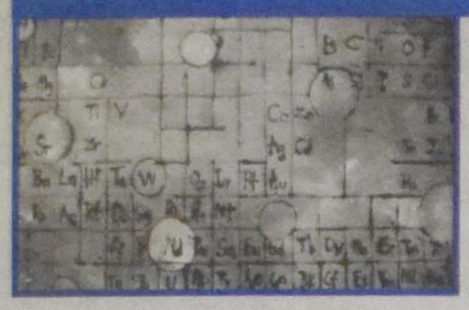

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News. Clues. Kingdom views.

CHRISTIAN COURIER

Denominational college in financial crunch

The college faces significant debt payments, which have already impacted its operating budget.

Calvin College and the debt trap

Angela Reitsma Bick

Calvin College has just reduced its faculty and staff by 22 positions. Five people have been let go, and 17 jobs will remain vacant after retirement or contract dates expire.

It's one of many cost-cutting measures that the Grand Rapids, Michigan-based college must take as it faces significant payments on a long-term debt of $116 million that comes due in 2017. Part of its strategy to address that debt includes reducing its operating budget by 10 percent over the next four years.

The public announcement about staff cuts came from college president Michael Le Roy.

"While I am pleased to report a great deal of progress on a number of fronts, I am saddened by the recognition that this progress has come with difficult choices and personal sacrifice," he said.

Le Roy replaced former president Gaylen Byker after his retirement in June 2012. The new president commissioned an internal task force to review the college's financial situation last fall. But information on Calvin College's financial woes trickled out slowly to the wider community. When a *Banner* article in late October reported that the college had trimmed spending to handle the payments on its long-term debt, that was the first time many supporters heard of it. In December, Henry DeVries, the VP of administration, finance and information services, quietly stepped down. Mid-February, Le Roy posted his summary of task force's report – only omitting, he said, details pertinent to personnel reviews.

The task force revealed that the college had borrowed money to pay for various building projects and – hoping to multiply revenue – invested donor dollars rather than use those to foot the bill. Additional budget shortfalls were blamed on cost overruns and real estate purchases that decreased in value.

"Investment governance and administration practices had a lot of room for improvement," Le Roy said in an open letter on Calvin's website (**calvin.edu/admin/president**). On behalf of the board, Scott Spoelhof also posted a letter, which admits that Calvin had been "living beyond its means" (**calvin.edu/admin/president/finances/letter**) but didn't define that statement further.

But the use of debt financing will have implications beyond the staff and faculty positions cut so far. In a May interview with

See **College** *on page 2*

Regret, apology, forgiveness and reconciliation in Calvin's College's financial crisis

What is the appropriate response when wrongdoing has occurred?

Nicholas Wolterstorff

Three documents concerning the current financial crisis of Calvin College were made public in [recent months]: a letter from the board of trustees, the recommendations of the Financial Review Task Force that president Michael Le Roy had appointed and a brief personal letter from president Le Roy. In the light of these three documents I offer some brief reflections on truth, disappointment, regret, apology, forgiveness and reconciliation. (Yes, if read aloud that's a mouthful!)

A bit of the crisis is due to negative developments in which the college had no role – a substantial increase in the cost of employee health insurance, for example. I want to discuss only the main causes of the crisis, namely, the cost over-runs on building projects and the investments that were made in recent years.

It appears to me that the board can in fact be blamed for failure to exercise due oversight.

Three possibilities come to mind as to the nature of Calvin's cost over-runs and investments. First, the over-runs and investments were prudent; but Calvin, like most colleges and universities, experienced the effects of the recession. Second, the over-runs and investments were risky and exhibited poor judgment; but nobody is morally culpable. Third, the over-runs and investments were morally irresponsible; they were a betrayal of the fiduciary trust placed by the Christian Reformed Church and by the supporters of the college in the administration and board of the college.

Hindsight and oversight

Let us consider the three possibilities I mentioned. The first possibility is that the over-runs and investments were prudent, and the cause of the college's financial crisis is that Calvin has been suffering the effects of the recession. If that is the actual state of affairs, then the appropriate attitude on the part of the college and its supporters is *disappointment* – disappointment that the economy went into recession and that, as a

See **Reconciliation** *on page 2*

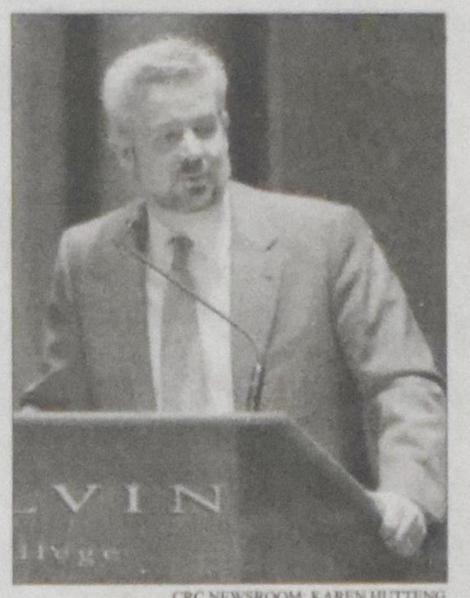
College *continued*

Christianity Today, president Le Roy said that all deans and directors at Calvin College are evaluating their programs to see what's working well. "They are going to prioritize the programs that meet those standards in the highest way down to the ones that are less so. This summer we are going to cost out those areas that are on the lower end to see what programs we need to discontinue."

Responsibility

Of greater concern to some people is an accounting system that didn't catch, or report, this problem sooner. Transactions paying off interest on the debt have not been included in past budget presentations. Information on debt repayment "was not visible to most, not to faculty senate and not to the board," Le Roy told faculty senate in December 2012.

Because the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) owns Calvin College, many people – whether they support the school through tuition dollars, alumni donations or membership shares to the CRC – feel that the explanations for the crisis so far have been unsatisfactory, given the debt's significant size. But no further details from the college have come out since the president's letter in March, and there has been minimal coverage elsewhere. Next year's budget has now been approved, and a new VP of admin and finance will try to keep Calvin on financially level ground over the next few years. On June 4, Sally Vander Ploeg was appointed new VP for administration and finance, a role she has covered since DeVries' departure.



CRC NEWSROOM: KAREN HUTTENG

President Le Roy shared some of Calvin's financial challenges with Synod on June 10.

Meanwhile, many questions remain. Who is responsible when millions are lost in a high-risk investment strategy? What is the appropriate level of transparency? Those are some of the issues John Tamming wrestles with in his guest editorial, "Dancing with the Lehman Brothers," on page four.

Can everything be blamed on the recession, or were some investments morally irresponsible? Can we move forward in Christian community if wrongdoing is not acknowledged? Nicholas Wolterstorff addresses those questions in his article adjacent.

In 2011, two accounting professors from Calvin College – Don Reynolds and Ray Slager – published an article in *The Banner* called "Avoiding the Debt Trap," which included specific advice for individuals struggling with over-spending.

"At the heart of this matter lies a serious spiritual problem: we don't recognize who exactly owns our resources," Reynolds and Slager said. Since Calvin's $116 million debt was taken on in 2007, you could say that advice came four years too late. And it applies equally to individuals and institutions.

"We all need to learn how to handle wisely what God has given us. And we need to exercise discipline in spending," as the accounting profs emphasized, in order to avoid falling into a trap called debt.

Angela Reitsma Bick is Editor of Christian Courier.

More info

A group calling itself the **Ad Hoc Committee for yet more transparency at Calvin College** has set up a Facebook page that collects comments and information, including published articles, on the topic. A Facebook search will direct you to that forum of Calvin supporters who want to know more.

Reconciliation *continued*

consequence, the college is in financial crisis. Everybody to whom I have talked who understands what was going on thinks that at least some of the cost over-runs and investments were in fact risky and exhibited poor judgment; they do not think that everything was done prudently and that the college is simply suffering the effects of the recession. So let us consider the second possibility mentioned, that the cost over-runs and investments were risky and exhibited poor judgment, but that no moral culpability is involved.

The three documents mentioned don't commit themselves one way or another on the issue of whether moral culpability was involved on the part of those responsible for the over-runs and investments. It is my own judgment that they also do not tell us enough about what happened to enable us to make up our own minds on the matter. (Those who are more financially astute than I am may think I am mistaken about that.)

It is noteworthy that in its letter the board also acknowledges no blameworthiness on its part. It says that "stronger board oversight may have detected the issues earlier" and that "in hindsight the board would have greatly benefited from having the detail of information we have today." This falls short, obviously, of saying that the board *ought to have had* stronger oversight.

It appears to me that the board can in fact be blamed for failure to exercise due oversight. But let us suppose that it cannot be blamed or faulted. And let us suppose that the poor judgments of those responsible for making the cost over-run and investment decisions were likewise non-culpable. Let us suppose, in short, that there was no wrongdoing on anyone's part. Mistakes in judgment and neglect of oversight, yes; but no wrongdoing. Whether or not that is true, the college has been harmed, grievously harmed, by those mistakes and by that neglect.

The cost of secrecy

Given this harm to the college, what is the appropriate response on the part of those responsible for the over-run and investment decisions, and what is the appropriate response on the part of the board for its neglect of due oversight? I would say that the appropriate response in both cases is a public expression of deep regret by these officials for the crisis caused by their mistakes and neglect, and an offer to aid the college in whatever way they can in its crisis. Not some general sort of regret for what happened, but regret specifically for their role in bringing about the crisis.

Cost over-runs on projects like this highway overpass have been blamed, but the college declines to reveal who is responsible for having done what.

We can consider what should be done in the case of such culpability by moving on to the third of the three possibilities I mentioned: those who made the cost over-run and investment decisions acted irresponsibly; they are morally culpable for doing what they did, blameworthy. And the board is culpable for not having exercised due oversight. In this case, the college and its supporters have been wronged, morally wronged, both by those who made the over-run and investment decisions and by the board for its neglect of due oversight.

When someone wrongs someone, what is the appropriate response on the part of the wrongdoer? Admission of guilt, expression of repentance, an offer of restitution if restitution is possible, and a plea for forgiveness. And what is the appropriate response, by the person who was wronged, to these actions by the wrongdoer? Forgiveness is the appropriate response.

The college has offered an analytic description of the cost over-runs and investments that were made; but it declines to reveal who is responsible for having done what. To do that, it says, would be to reveal "personnel" matters that should not be made public. Perhaps such secrecy is for the best; I don't know. But it should not be overlooked that it carries a significant cost. If those who had a role in the over-run and investment decisions that were made do not themselves step forward to acknowledge their role and to express either regret or repentance, and if the board expresses neither regret nor repentance for its failure of due oversight, then there can be no reconciliation. Many supporters of the college will continue to feel bruised and angry. Others may decide that it's best to put what happened out of mind and get on with things. Over the long haul, widespread amnesia may set in. But there is no reconciliation. At the time of writing, only one person from the previous administration has stepped forward to acknowledge her role and to apologize, Shirley Hoogstra, Vice President for Student Life.

In the absence of reconciliation, the best one can hope for is that the president and the board jointly take steps to forestall this sort of calamity from happening in the future. The letter from the board and the letter from the president report a number of such steps. To me, the steps they mention appear both appropriate and promising. They are to be applauded for taking them.

I hope and pray that Calvin College may survive this grievous blow and continue to be the creative and high-quality center for Christian learning that it has been for many years. In my informed, but admittedly not impartial, judgment, Calvin over the past quarter century or so has become the premier Christian college in the land. I hope and pray that it will continue to be that.

Nicholas Wolterstorff is the Noah Porter Professor of Philosophical Theology Emeritus, Yale University, and long-time professor of philosophy at Calvin College. This was originally posted online at ***blog.calvinincommon.org/.*** *Wolterstorff's most recent book is* Justice in Love *(2010).*

Column

From the Lab

Rudy Eikelboom

Mental illness, demons and DSM

Many of us have been touched by at least one mental illness. Either we have experienced the pain ourselves, or one of our close friends or family members have struggled with a mental disease. Fortunately, we are becoming more willing to discuss these diseases; the stigma is lifting and that is good, but much pain and suffering remains. Better tools and treatments are slowly being provided, to help some individuals struggling with one of these debilitating disorders.

One of the prime motivators for my research with rats is to help open up the window on these disorders. If we can mimic one aspect of a human disorder in an animal model, we can experiment with treatments that may prove helpful to humans. My work focuses on animal models of eating disorders and addictions, but others are looking at models of depression, schizophrenia and other mental disorders. We want to understand these puzzling disorders better so they can be prevented or treated, relieving human suffering.

One requirement for better understanding these disorders is a description of the disorder that we can all agree on. For example, when does the bereavement experienced by a widow over the loss of her spouse cross over into the helplessness of depression? Grief is a natural response to loss, but for some individuals it morphs into an inability to act that is part of the definition of depression.

We don't have modern equivalents to all of the symptoms of those suffering demon possession described in the gospels, nor do we see healing happening in the same way.

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) provides a shared definition of mental illnesses in order to aid in their treatment.

Shared resource

For many years clinicians have worked with the American Psychiatric Association (APA)'s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) in its various versions. This manual describes the different mental illnesses and lists the criteria needed to classify someone with a particular disorder. A system like this is essential if doctors are going to determine which treatments are helpful. If psychiatrists cannot agree that two individuals have the same illness, how can they find an effective treatment for the disorder? Similarly, researchers need a comprehensive definition of what is at the heart of a disorder in order to seek treatments and cures.

During his ministry Jesus healed many people with mental problems who were described by the gospel writers as being possessed by demons. In some stories the symptoms described suggest medical conditions recognized today, such as epileptic seizures (Mark 9:14-29); in other cases the descriptions have no immediate current reference (Mark 5:1-20; a passage which also speaks to the relevance of animal research to mental illness). Whatever the symptoms, all these individuals were cured, we are told, by the casting out of demons. As a Christian I accept these stories as evidence that demon possession is at some level reality. The ability to cast out demons, however, is a gift of healing rarely displayed today. But the texts don't imply that there are no other treatments for mental illnesses, just as there may be other treatments for the physical illnesses Jesus healed miraculously.

Does the definition matter?

So together with researchers across the world I look for other explanations for mental disorders, such that doctors can be given practical tools to help individuals with these illnesses. However if we need to look for other ways than as demonic possession to understand mental illnesses, we need different labels and descriptors. Thus the importance of the DSM system for classifying mental illness; it provides a reference doctors and researchers can use so that we are speaking of the same illness. As a researcher I need to know what the line is between social drinking and alcoholism, and how alcoholism is related to other addictions. Only then can I see if my animal models capture essential features of these disorders.

This May the APA released a new version of the DSM. In the works since 1999, the DSM-5 replaces the DSM-IV. It is bigger (like every edition before it) and has generated considerable controversy in the medical community. I will be discussing these issues in my next column, but if you do a web search for "DSM-5," you will gain further insight into the controversy around this new edition.

Even with the advances we are making there is still much more that needs to be done to help those with these debilitating disorders. Pray for those who suffer from mental illness and for those who are trying to understand the causal factors, so that we may develop better understanding and treatments for these mental disorders.

Rudy Eikelboom (reikelboom@wlu.ca), who has seen mental health problems in his family, is a member of the Waterloo CRC and Chair of the Psychology Department at Wilfrid Laurier University.

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Editorial

Dancing with the Lehman brothers

The risky history of Calvin College's investment strategies

John Tamming

When I attended Calvin College in the early 1980s for some of the best years of my life, it had 4,200 students and no significant financial concerns. It now has around 4,000 students and carries a debt of $116 million. Despite a decline in enrollment, Calvin has more than doubled its physical infrastructure over the last 30 years. Part of this is recruitment-driven. For many incoming students, college is all about the bells and whistles. Thus the diving pool with continuous bubbles and an outsized gym which only a George Bush visit can manage to fill. I attended Calvin in order to sit at the feet of Runner and Spykman and I would have studied in a barn to learn reformational philosophy, but that all seems rather quaint now.

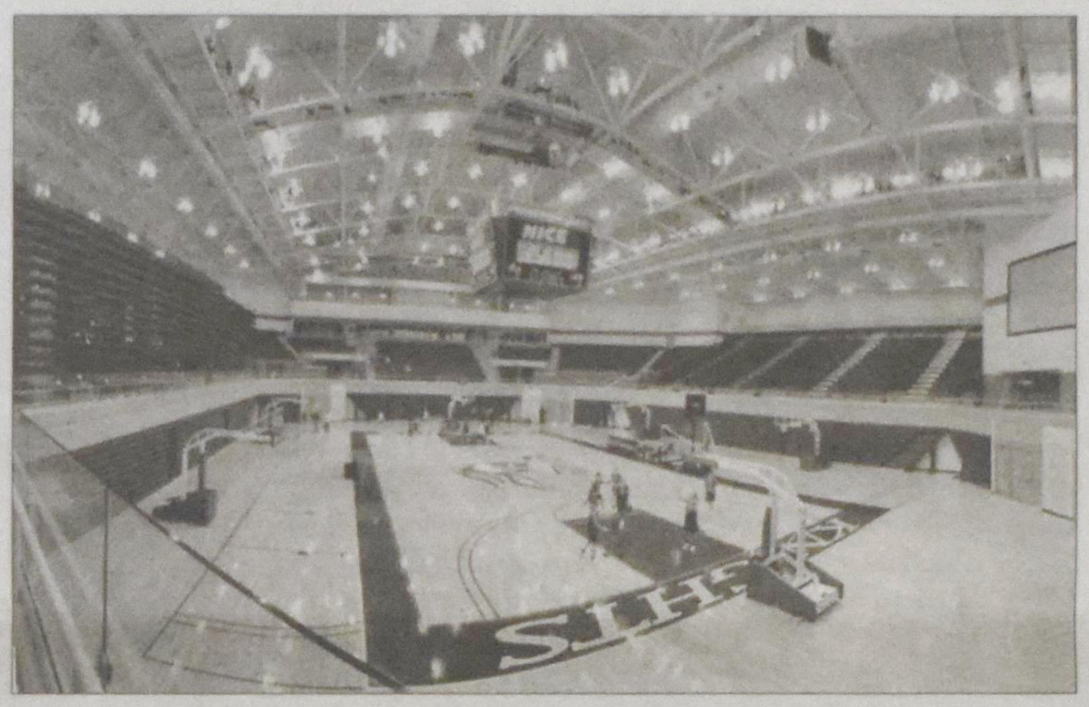
For three decades, the campus has been a non-stop construction zone. I assumed, as others did, that there must be some serious money lying around west Michigan to finance this boom. With student growth flatlining, such expansion could only be funded through generous donations. And while there have been such donors, their donations didn't exactly pay for those projects directly. No, that money went elsewhere.

Driven

But let's back up a moment. I still remember reading the 1995 Agenda for Synod, which contained a job application from one Gaylen Byker. He was the sole nominee for the post of college president. He cited Richard Mouw and Nicholas Wolterstorff as references – a good sign. His resume seemed rather odd in places, especially in its focus on investment banking experience. Byker seemed good at assessing risk and developing hedging strategies. He structured copper-indexed loans in a non-conventional manner, made use of swaps and concluded that in one transaction, "my drive, determination and enthusiasm inspired the team." Ok, a bit of a brag, but Kuyper was no shrinking violet either.

The board apparently thought they needed someone with proven financial background. It unanimously approved him and in a few short years the campus was populated with hardhats and backhoes. Calvin also bought up many adjoining properties (thankfully the line was drawn at purchasing Woodland Mall).

Though the number of buildings has doubled, Calvin's enrollment has not matched that growth.



Calvin took on debt in order to build facilities like the Spoelhof centre.

Yes, Mrs. VanderSluis, sitting there in Oskaloosa knitting doilies to raise funds for the Kingdom, you were dancing with the Lehman Brothers of this world and did not even know it.

Diverted

And for 15 years or more, all was going rather swimmingly. Except, it wasn't. As it turns out, very little of this was actually being paid for in the ordinary sense of the phrase "paid for." Donations were being collected, but rather than applying the donated funds to the things it was raised for, the money was made subject to the imaginations of Calvin administration.

"Let's leverage the stuff!", someone shouted and leveraged it was.

"Let's perform a swap derivative on it!" cried another.

"OK, why not," murmured the board of trustees.

They cannot say they were not told what was happening. As late as February 2012, the VP of administration, finance and information services bragged of the college's aggressive investing practices in *Business Officer Magazine*. He stated that the college sought to generate "nontraditional revenue streams," to "leverage tenant revenue," and to enter deals which "can be risky and complicated." This included the issuance of taxable bonds (you cannot make this stuff up). Urging the doubters to gird their loins, our bold VP of admin and finance continues: "Such endeavours are not for the faint of heart, nor for the impatient." Lest we think the VP a rogue investor, he assures the reader that "the board's administration and finance committee was instrumental in assessing the financial risk for the college. Our president [Gaylen Byker] kept cabinet members and the board of trustees' executive committee advised with respect to any emerging details."

Willing partner?

The standard financial statements of the college also routinely set forth what the college was doing with its money, including large investments in something called the Fuller Foundation. Such investments were not your grandmother's GIC but included options, warrants, puts, calls and associated derivative instruments used in covered hedge transactions. Yes, Mrs. VanderSluis, sitting there in Oskaloosa knitting doilies to raise funds for the Kingdom, you were dancing with the Lehman Brothers of this world and did not even know it.

But Calvin's board and administration certainly did.

Byker was a Director of the Fuller Foundation, which invested a good deal of money indirectly in something called InterOil, of which Dr. Byker is and at the time was a key executive. Concerned about online rumours that suggested a conflict of interest here, I wrote to Byker directly. He emailed me this response: "*No funds donated to Calvin College were invested in any corporation in which I had a personal (direct or indirect) financial interest.*" In other words, the Fuller money that found its way into InterOil was not Calvin money. That is as clear a denial as Christians should require from another, and should put that issue to rest. Indeed, Byker advised me that shares in InterOil had been donated in his name to the college – and I don't doubt that act of generosity either (whether those shares still have much value is another issue).

Staggering losses

Still, the optics of this are awful and should have been apparent to any board member. It is fair to ask – what exactly did this president- and board-sanctioned strategy deliver? Losses on an unprecedented scale. Between 2009 and 2012, college financial statements show a net loss of $7.7 million. The actual sums for before 2009 are not public, nor are the fees which the hedge fund managers made on Calvin, despite these staggering losses. Regretfully, Calvin supporters will not know the entire truth because, incredibly, the new Calvin president, Michel Le Roy, has decided not to make public the results of his internal investigation. To me, the absence of complete disclosure makes even this $7.7m loss suspect.

Byker retired in June 2012, leaving Le Roy to discover the financial pit he had created. The VP was let go or left, but other than that, I predict little will change. We are told by Le Roy that the college is tightening its investment criteria and revamping board oversight.

Our Lord would be as incredulous as any of us at the recklessness of this church-financed college: "*Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it?*"

If these words of our Saviour are sitting there in Luke 14 for all to read, how is it that Christian college administrators somehow missed it?

John A. Tamming is a barrister and solicitor in Owen Sound, Ontario.

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The paper is published the second and fourth Mondays of the month.

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We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Canada Periodical Fund of the Department of Canadian Heritage.

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Letters

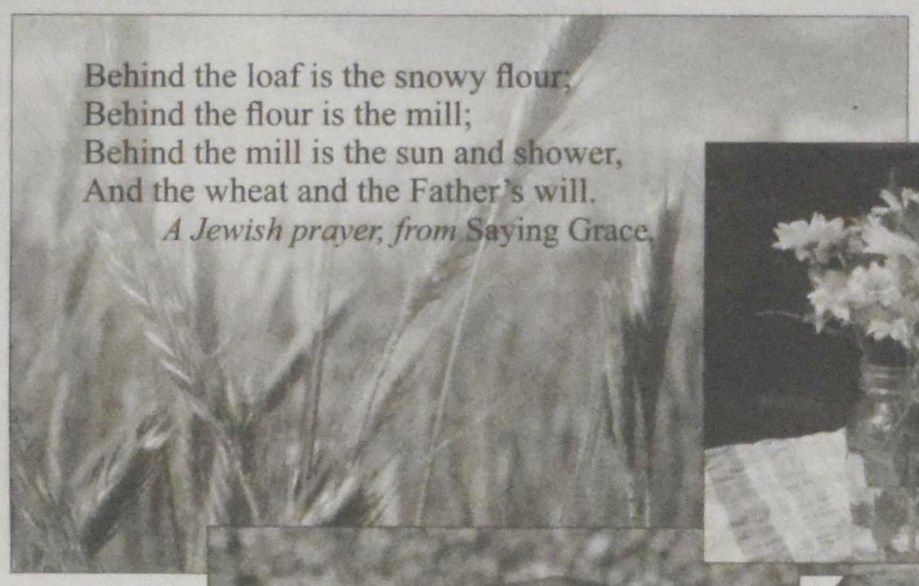
Letters to heaven

Prayers from around the world

Our family has been trying the ACTS prayer after supper for about two years: each person taking it in turns to offer adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication to God. We'll keep this framework for some evenings, but we're ready to introduce something new. So when I read Eat with Joy: Redeeming God's gift of food *by Rachel Marie Stone (see June 10* Christian Courier*), I was happy to find several simple prayers at the end of each chapter. It is good to learn to pray off the cuff, from the heart. But it's also good to pray in chorus with other Christians. Below are some of my favourites from her book.*

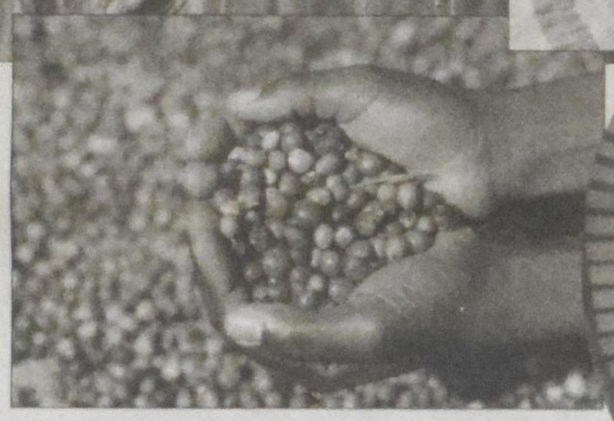
The beauty of structured prayer, Christian blogger Rachel Held Evans pointed out recently, is the reminder that faith isn't just about me. "These prayers, written down ahead of time, often first spoken long before my birth, remind me to turn my thoughts toward the people I love, to forgive and ask forgiveness, to pray for my enemies, to plead for mercy for 'the things I have done and the things I have left undone,' to remember the hungry and the suffering, to 'bless the congregation of the poor,' to worship, to thank, to intercede, and to join with the whole community of saints who – this very hour, all around the world, and for centuries past and to come – are praying these prayers with me today" (from "Give us this day: some thoughts on structured prayer," **rachelheldevans.com**, *June 4, 2013).*

We were created to live in community. May the prayers that remind us of that sink into our bones and knit us together as God's children. – Angela Reitsma Bick, Editor



Behind the loaf is the snowy flour;
Behind the flour is the mill;
Behind the mill is the sun and shower,
And the wheat and the Father's will.
A Jewish prayer, from Saying Grace.

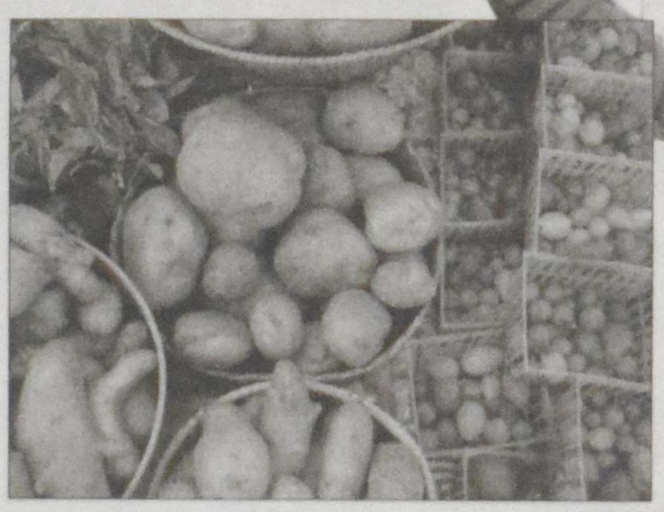
We are happy
Because you have accepted us, dear Lord.
Sometimes we do not know what to do
With all our happiness.
We swim in your grace
Like a whale in the ocean.
The saying goes:
"An ocean never dries up,"
But we know your grace also never fails.
This food you have given us
Is one more proof.
Dear Lord,
Your grace is our happiness.
Hallelujah!
From Table Prayers –
a prayer from Africa



God of the just weight
and the fair measure,
let me remember the hands
that harvested my food, my drink,
not only in my prayers
but in the marketplace.
Let me not seek a bargain that leaves
another hungry.
From Harvest for the World
by Janet Morley

We cannot love you, God,
unless we love each other,
And to love each other we must
know each other in the breaking of bread –
As the disciples knew Christ after the resurrection.
Here, at this table, we are not alone –
you are with us as we are with each other.
Heaven is a banquet, and life is a banquet, too,
Even with only a dry crust shared in companionship.
Love comes with community.
Bless this food
Bless us as we love one another, and as we love You.
Adapted by Rachel Stone from a quote from Dorothy Day.

May God bless those
who eat, and may he bless
all those who worked
to bring this food to the
table. To Christ, who feeds
us, be all glory, forever.
Amen.
Armenian Prayer



O God,
Bless this food we are about to receive.
Give bread to those who are hungry
And make we who have bread
To hunger for justice.
Nicaraguan Prayer

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ST. CATHARINES ON L2N 1V1
email: **subscriptions@christiancourier.ca**

U.S. Mail:
Christian Courier (USPS 518-090)
Second-class postage paid at
Lewiston NY
Postmaster: send address changes
to: Christian Courier, Box 110
Lewiston NY 14092

Subscriptions:	**Canada and USA**	**Overseas**
one year (24 issues)	$58.00	$100
two years (48 issues)	$110.00	

Advertising deadlines: display and classified advertising: Tuesday, 9 a.m. (13 days before publication date) See classified pages or web site **www.christiancourier.ca** for more details. (ISSN 1192-3415) Published second and fourth Mondays of the month.

Address all correspondence to: 5 Joanna Dr, St. Catharines ON L2N 1V1
Tel: 905-682-8311 or 1-800-969-4838
e-mail: Advertising: **ads@christiancourier.ca**
Subscriptions: **subscriptions@christiancourier.ca** **PRINTED IN CANADA**

News

BOT president to CRC Synod: Trust 'the God of third day hope'

Marian Van Til

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. – The 2013 General Synod of the Christian Reformed Church met at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Mich., from June 7 to 14, amidst financial difficulties and social changes.

But Rev. John Terpstra, outgoing president of the CRC Board of Trustees, emphasized that God is moving in and through the Christian Reformed Church, and he's "inviting us right now to face with new confidence the second day challenges that have come before us in recent years." Terpstra said he sensed in the Agenda for Synod 2013 "the powerful movement of the God of third day hope," referring to the resurrection that follows despair.

Elected as officers were President: William T. Koopmans, pastor of Grace, Chatham, Ont.; Vice President: Reginald Smith, senior pastor of Roosevelt Park Community, Grand Rapids; 1st Clerk: Loren Veldhuizen, retired attorney, Calvary, Orange City, Iowa; 2nd Clerk: William Verhoef, pastor, 2nd, Denver.

After assenting to the denomination's three doctrinal standards, delegates spent the rest of Friday, and Saturday too, in their assigned advisory committees. By long tradition, synod conducts its nitty gritty work in such committees, of which there were eight: Synodical Services I (polity matters); Synodical Services II (program matters); Education and Candidacy; Faith Formation and Publications; Mission and Ministry; Financial Matters; Interdenominational Matters; Church Order and Appeals.

The process: after discussing their assigned issues and requests (overtures), members agree on a course of action and draw up written recommendations to bring to the synod floor for deliberation by the whole body. If unresolved differences exist in committee, both minority and majority reports can be presented.

On Sunday evening the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship and Woodlawn CRC hosted a song festival which introduced delegates and community members to the new joint CRC/RCA (Reformed Church in America) hymnal, *Lifts Up Your Hearts*.

Board of Trustees members laid hands on Joel Boot as delegates prayed for him.

50 candidates for ministry in the Christian Reformed Church welcomed by Synod.

CRC NEWSROOM PHOTOS – KAREN HUTTENGA

Young Adult Representatives for Synod 2013(l-r): Chadd Huizenga, Nicole Scholten, Cedric Parsels, Kyle Schaap, Nicholas Chuba, Nicole Veenkamp, and Laura de Jong.

In business on Monday and Tuesday, Synod:

- Clarified the status of "commissioned pastors"
  – They should be acknowledged by that title (and are no longer considered "elders"); their work on church councils will be limited to their areas of ministry; they're ordained for work only in their own classis. The change reflects their actual functions.
- Tightened confidentiality rules
  – Revised rules will better protect the privacy of abuse victims and others bringing appeals or confidential communications; or when disclosure could potentially damage reputations.
- Celebrated 125 years of ministry with CR World Missions
- Dissolved the board of Faith Alive (the CRC's publishing arm)
  – Board dissolution is effective June 30. Some "critical functions" of FA (re: "faith formation," Sunday school curricula) will be assigned to other agencies, and *The Banner* will temporarily operate under the CRCNA's Board of Trustees. FA "has been trying to operate like a small commercial publisher," said director Mark Rice. That will change, as the market has already changed.
- Was apprised of the financial difficulties of Calvin College
  – New Calvin President Michael Le Roy was commended for his "transparency" in dealing with Calvin's financial shortfall. The college will "re-purpose" 10 percent of its operating budget to meet loan payments; 17 vacant positions were not re-filled, five people were laid off.
- Decided not to change the pension system for pastors
- Decided a new study of capital punishment is not necessary
- Turned down an overture to "develop concrete strategies to carry out the Great Commission"
  – It was declared that the church already maintains "a good balance proclaiming the Gospel in word and deed."
- Heard results of a CRC survey conducted by Calvin's Center for Social Research
  – The church is older; members engage in less personal and family Bible reading and prayer; higher incomes don't translate into giving more to the church. *Look for details of this survey in CC's next issue.*
- Heard from executive director Joel Boot how "God is moving" in the CRC

It was never easier for CRC members – or anyone interested – to "attend" synod. All public sessions could be followed live online. To make those sessions more intelligible, synod documents, including the entire agenda and agenda supplement, were available for download. (This material is still available at **www.crcna.org/synod/synod-documents**.) CC*'s next issue will report on any additional important synod decisions that had not yet occurred at press time.*

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German comfort PAGE 10
This Sunday: Sanctity of Hum PAGE 16
CHRISTIAN COURIER
A well-aged anchor of our faith: Happy 450, Heidelberg
My only comfort

Synod urged churches to celebrate the Heidelberg Confession's 450th anniversary this year, as Christian Courier *did in January. For original reflections from Richard Mouw, Cal Seerveld and more, visit* ***christiancourier.ca*** *and find Jan.14, 2013 in our Archives. Synod also asked congregations to recite the catechism's Q&A 1 during worship on Sept. 15.*

Thailand: Dog saves abandoned newborn, brings infant home

THA RUA, Thailand (LN) – A family dog in Thailand was credited with bringing home an abandoned newborn baby earlier this month. The two-year-old dog, Pui, found a plastic bag with a newborn baby girl inside and carried the infant back home, said Pui's owners. Thai officials believe the baby was abandoned at a roadside dump in Tha Rua district of Ayutthaya province.

According to a report in the *Bangkok Post*, when Pui returned home, it barked loudly to get its owners' attention. The owners' 12-year-old daughter, Sudarat Thongmak, came out of the house and was shocked to find the baby. The tiny girl's umbilical cord was still attached. Sudarat ran to get her parents and the family rushed the baby to the hospital.

The baby, which was born one-and-a-half months prematurely, was in critical condition. Thai authorities were attempting to find the baby's mother but had been unsuccessful.

Meanwhile, Sundarat's mother, Pummarat, says she is interested in adopting the baby. In addition, the Red Cross office in Rua said that they have been approached by five families wanting to adopt the baby girl. No decision will be made until she is healthy, said a Red Cross spokesperson. The little girl is currently still in an incubator, although her condition is improving.

Meanwhile, the dog received a special certificate from the Red Cross and earned his family money to pay for food for him and other dogs the family owns. Pui is a bangkaew, a specifically Thai breed. The breed is described by Wikipedia as "alert and watchful, protective of home and family."

News

Sri Lanka: Christians facing escalating persecution

A Sri Lankan Christian offers prayers during Mass in Colombo.

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (BP/ICC) – Christians in Sri Lanka, off the southern coast of India, are facing an increase in persecution at the hands of Buddhists who say that the country is a historic Buddhist land that should not be shared with anyone else.

Christianity is viewed in Sri Lanka as a product of Western colonialism that threatens Buddhists' identity, International Christian Concern (ICC) says, adding that the practice of Christian evangelism is seen as an obstruction to Buddhists' vision for the country.

Open Doors, which closely monitors the persecuted church, corroborated the account in a June 4 report, saying Sri Lanka has seen 30 incidents of persecution against Christian churches since January, and "the perpetrators of such acts were not brought to justice."

The United Nations Human Rights Council has cited the continuation of "enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, torture, and violations of the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, as well as . . . discrimination on the basis of religion or belief," noted a CNN contributor on June 4. It was also noted that the 30-year-long civil war in Sri Lanka ended four years ago, but that the country still oppresses specific people and religious groups.

In late May of this year, a 30-year-old monk set himself on fire to protest the spread of Christianity in Sri Lanka. His supporters said they would make his dying wish a reality, ICC reported, indicating persecution against Christians could further escalate. About 200 Sri Lankan Buddhists blocked traffic in the capital of Colombo to protest after authorities rejected a state funeral for the monk, the first Sri Lankan Buddhist to set himself on fire as a form of protest.

'Buddhist Taliban'

The dramatic increase in persecution of Sri Lankan Christians was already evident last year, when Christians were attacked in more than 50 incidents for practicing their faith. Reports of Christian pastors and their families being threatened and having their homes firebombed have almost become common, ICC said. And Catholic World News cited a bishop who said the cause of the uptick in persecution is the growth of what he calls the "Buddhist Taliban."

Sri Lanka, with 21.5 million people, is 69 percent Buddhist, eight percent Muslim, seven percent Hindu and seven percent Christian, with many of the Christians being Catholic, according to the Catholic World News report cited by ICC.

In March this year, a large mob attacked a pastor's home while the family was away and began damaging the property, demanding an end to the church services in the home. Late last year, the same pastor had been accosted and threatened by a group of Buddhists telling him to close down the church. The protesters returned the next day and attacked the building during a worship service, injuring the pastor.

Also in March, 10 churches faced persecution in the form of threats, disturbances, harassment or attacks, mostly from Buddhist monks, but sometimes with the assistance of the police or a mob.

Last summer, a 14-year-old boy, the only Christian in his class at school, was severely beaten and threatened with death if he did not stop spreading Christianity. "What is troubling today is the increase in the severity and frequency of the attacks, raising concerns over the motivations behind them and the safety of Christians," ICC said. "Although Buddhism is the national religion, the government has expressed its desire to provide religious freedom to all. This is a claim that is severely undermined by the apathy of the police, the courts and the judicial system when it comes to cases filed by Christians against their persecutors."

In April, the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka expressed deep concern over the "prevalence . . . of an organized campaign of hatred against adherents of non-majority faiths." The evangelical group said, "There are two alarming factors about the current situation. The first is that the violence seems to be organized and orchestrated by two organizations. Hence the violence has sustainability. Secondly, and most alarmingly, both the extremist violent organizations seemingly have patronage and support from authorities and hence the impunity with which they operate." The evangelicals did not identify the two organizations.

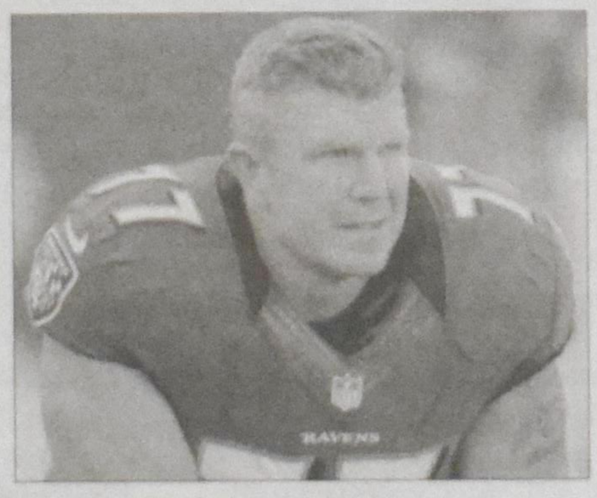
ICC believes that the motivation for the use of violence by Sri Lankan Buddhists is rooted in politics and ethnic identity. It concluded, "Without an urgent initiative to protect its religious minorities, Sri Lanka runs the risk of empowering an unhealthy nationalistic sentiment that will only subvert its earnest efforts to birth a better nation out of the ashes of war."

U.S.: Super Bowl champ skips Obama meeting over 'God bless Planned Parenthood' remark

BALTIMORE, Maryland (LifeSiteNews) – For many American athletes the chance to meet the President of the United States is a once-in-a-lifetime, not-to-be-missed opportunity. But not for Super Bowl champ Matt Birk.

Birk, who earned his Super Bowl ring in February as a center with the Baltimore Ravens, told KFAN-FM that he decided to skip a meet-and-greet with President Obama over the president's extreme support for abortion and Planned Parenthood.

"[The] president made a comment in a speech and he said, 'God bless Planned Parenthood,'" Birk told the radio station. "Planned Parenthood performs about 330,000 abortions a year. I am Catholic, I am active in the pro-life movement, and I just felt like I couldn't deal with that. I have great respect for the office of the president, and but couldn't endorse in any way" the president's support for the U.S.'s top abortion provider.



Birk takes a stand off the field for what he believes in.

"I'm very confused by President Obama's statement," Birk added. "For God to bless a place where they're ending 330,000 lives a year? I just chose not to attend."

Obama said, "God bless Planned Parenthood remark" at the conclusion of his speech to a Planned Parenthood conference in April. Obama is the only sitting U.S. president to have attended and addressed such a conference.

This is not the first time that Birk has been outspoken on social issues. He told *Catholic Review* that participating in the March for Life in Washington was "one of the coolest things I've done. It seems like our society and media want to push pro-lifers to the side and hope that we would shut our mouths and go away quietly. Let's not do that."

Last October Birk made headlines when he weighed in on the gay marriage debate, defending traditional marriage. "My hope is that, by adding my voice to this discussion, I encourage the majority of Americans who do agree that it's not the state's place to redefine marriage to speak up with truth and respect," he said at the time. "Bonding one man and one woman together through marriage helps connect both moms and dads to their kids; that's why the state cares about marriage in the first place. Society should always be looking for ways to strengthen marriage, rather than redefine it."

Benedict in retirement: 'I read, I pray. I'm fine'

VATICAN CITY (CCO) – "I'm fine. I live like a monk," Benedict XVI told an old German friend who visited him recently at his new residence in the Mater Ecclesiae monastery on the Vatican grounds.

Manfred Lutz, a German scholar who is a member of the Pontifical Council for the Laity and the Pontifical Academy for Life, told *Bild Zeitung* that he found the retired Pontiff "physically weaker and a bit more stooped" than a few months earlier, but still mentally alert and cheerful. He said that the Pope-emeritus finds himself thoroughly in accord with the theological statements of Pope Francis.

The Italian site *Libero*, perhaps intending to stir up controversy, wondered whether Benedict's statement that he agreed with Pope Francis on theological matters could hint that he disagreed with his successor on other issues. But the statement by the former pontiff – which was relayed by Lutz rather than given in Benedict's own words – contained no such indication.

Benedict XVI described his current life as quiet and relaxed. "I read, I pray. I'm fine," he said.

Columns

Flowers and Thistles

Curt Gesch

Teacher makes chemistry come alive in Hazelton, B.C.

If you are a habitué of coffee shops you know that the senate scandal, Rob Ford, the Stanley Cup, the weather and taxes are the current items of discussion and complaint. Not far behind these come musings about the sorry state of education, "kids nowadays," overpaid teachers and so on.

I won't address wages here because I know little about them, but I'm sure that Peter Schopfer, master science teacher at Hazelton Secondary School in British Columbia, certainly isn't paid enough. Through his inventive teaching and off-beat personality, he has led his Chemistry 11 students through a study of the periodic table that stimulates knowledge, hard work, imagination and their composition skills.

It all started like this: Primo Levi (the Italo-Jewish novelist, chemist and Auschwitz survivor) once wrote a book name called *The Periodic Table* (Schocken Books, 1975). Hailed as "the best science book ever written" by London's Royal Institution, the book interweaves autobiography, Holocaust survival story and chemistry. Levi, a professional chemist, shapes each chapter loosely around one or another element from the periodic table. In a *tour de force*, his last chapter tells the life story of a carbon atom, from ancient times to its existence in Levi's day.

Unique heroes

That chapter was the inspiration for the student stories in *Periodic Adventures*. Students researched and immersed themselves in the life of one or another atomic element. They then "personalized" their research into fictional tales. We read of the love life of Alum (aluminum) and his search for Roxy, as well as the romantic notions of Nate (Nitrogen).

Nate (N) went on a journey and found three atoms named "Tri-Hydrogen; they had beautiful long blonde hair, big bright blue eyes, and nice rosy cheeks. He fell in love at first sight. Eventually he took them on a covalent date. They checked with the Law [to] see if they could form a bond to move forward in their relationship." After completing the bonding (NH_3), they became very unpopular because of their odor, but they were easily employable on the farm, in munitions and in creating fertilizers.

You'll have to read the rest to see how the polygamous Nate ends up.

Boris (Helium) is sequestered with a bunch of Noble Gases. He notices Nicki, a very pretty atom. It was love at first sight. Unfortunately, as Uncle Neon pointed out, "being Noble Gases meant they could never bond together, since their shells were already full."

Other chapter titles include "The Bond of Brothers" (Sodium), "Bitter but Better" (Magnesium), "The Electron Junkie" (Phosphorus). By now you've got the idea.

Who should order a copy of this book? To start with, every Chemistry teacher should get a few copies. High school libraries. Critics of students, teachers and schools. Anyone interested in learning about chemistry in a light-hearted, easily-accessible way. And the next coffee shop discussion will have new territory to explore.

The book is available from the
Hazelton Parents Advisory Committee
Hazelton Secondary School
Box 300
Hazelton BC V0J 1Y0
The cost is $9.95 plus shipping & handling.

Curt Gesch (cgesch63@gmail.com) is a retired teacher and a past colleague of Peter Schopfer. Together they once produced a group of curricular ideas called The Lite Stuff.

Ambassador

Thomas Wolthuis

Pontiff

On March 13, my wife and I were driving from Western Michigan back to Canada via the Blue Water Bridge at Sarnia, listening to the news of the election of the new Pope on the radio. We heard that the white smoke had ascended, and we waited for the announcement. As the commentators were filling the time, one noted that "pontiff" means "bridge maker." How ironic, we mused, as we crossed the bridge into Canada at that moment.

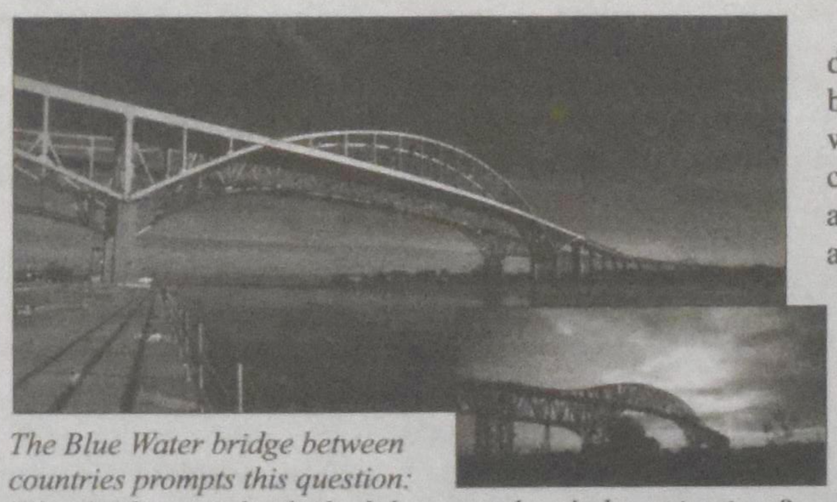
We arrived at our friend's condo in Sarnia just as the new pontiff was announced. He's the first pope Francis, named after the saint who was called to rebuild the church through a ministry to the poor. This is a wonderful symbolic emphasis for the first Western and Southern Hemisphere pontiff. May he be a bridge builder.

A Google search reveals that the word "pontiff" is related to a variety of leaders. Priests, leading powerful Romans, and, ultimately, the Emperor were referred to as pontiffs. Some object to this word and its priestly idea. While the image may be misconstrued, we can all benefit from the concept of being bridge builders, or pontiffs.

Between churches

With whom do we need to construct spans? Earlier on our bridge crossing day, an Institute of Christian Studies graduate and supporter told us about his work with many Catholic leaders in Southeast Michigan. How long, he wondered, does our church need to continue "protesting"? What an intriguing question. Is it helpful to continue to call one segment of the church the "Protestant" church? What bridges need to be built among churches?

We have a long history of protest. The Wolthuis side of my family comes from Ulrum in the Netherlands. They were church organists in the church where the *Afshceiding*, the 1834 church split often considered the forerunner of the Christian Reformed Church, began. Another side of my family, the Ditmars, were part of the "*Remonstrants*." My grandparents' church in Kalamazoo, Michigan, was for a while the Protesting Christian Reformed Church. Within the family of Dutch Reformed churches in North America there are over 20 different denominations. How long do we keep protesting?



The Blue Water bridge between countries prompts this question: What bridges need to be built between church denominations?

Many see "protest" as negative, just another way of complaining. At its root "to protest" is to "to declare publically, to testify." It is to speak against injustice on behalf of the oppressed and powerless. Too often, however, we build barriers, not bridges, in our protest.

A passion for justice aroused in the 1960s led people to attempt a march across a bridge in Selma, Alabama because they believed that black and white people could live and serve God better without mandated racial divides. The bridge walkers sang "We Shall Overcome" the disparities, the injustices, the persecutions and the heartbreak – not in our own strength, but through God who loves us and wants us to love each other.

Like many Canadian Christian schools, ICS was birthed during the protest era of the 1960s. We seek to build a bridge between the Christian community and the academic world. We protest against the idea of a neutral secular education on one side and an isolated church on the other. We are ambassadors of the love of God to the academic world and of the world of learning to the Christian community.

Bridging the gaps

We find enormous differences and disagreements in today's society, within churches and within families, but does it have to lead to division and conflict? Can our bridge building skills be turned to connect with others, rather than developing internal walls? Can our bridge construction become a testimony of grace and hope?

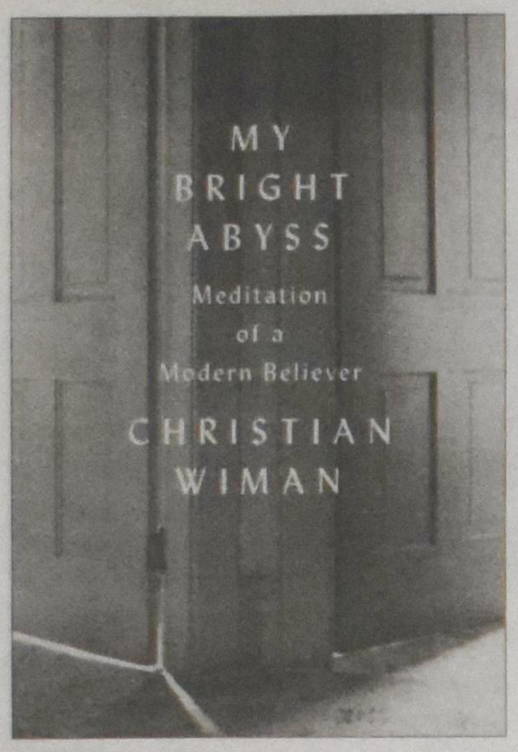
Since I am from Michigan, my vision is shaped by bridges. There is the strange ongoing story of the privately owned Ambassador Bridge between Windsor and Detroit. I also think of the story of the daring building of the Mackinaw Bridge. Ah, to be a bridge builder who risks the winds, who longs for a connection to the other shore, who hopes for safety for all the workers, who holds on to the new ironwork to put it in its proper place.

I believe in one holy catholic church. I am excited about a new pontiff who seeks to bring the church back to the needs of the poor, the disenfranchised and the creation. Blessings to the new pontiff as he heads his construction crew. I want us to be bridge builders, too. Read John 17:20-23 and Ephesians 2:14-22.

To whom do you passionately and daringly seek to build a bridge?

Rev. Tom Wolthuis (TWolthuis@icscanada.edu) shares the position of President of the Institute forChristian Studies in Toronto, Ont. with his wife, Dawn.

Reviews



My Bright Abyss: Meditation of a Modern Believer
by Christian Wiman
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013.

The difficult bliss of belief

Adele Konyndyk

I started Christian Wiman's memoir *My Bright Abyss* shortly before Ascension Day, with the hymns of Christ's rising triumph a week or so away from being sung. The timing lessened some of the dread I felt over beginning a book I knew to be written under a "deepening shadow of death" – the author's diagnosis of a rare incurable cancer. After reading Wiman's poetry, essays, and several interviews, I knew I was beginning a heavy journey – one that would confront affliction and doubt, not just echo the songs of joyful praise.

Wiman describes his life as "broken open" by cancer, and calls *Abyss* an effort to "speak more clearly" of how he believes in God. "How do you answer that burn of being?" he asks in the preface. "[And] What might it mean for your life – and for your death – to acknowledge that persistent ghost?"

As with many powerful meditations on faith – the ones I enjoy most, anyway – *Abyss* is more spiritual exploration than religious prescription. From the very beginning it is clear that *Abyss* is not a typical "conversion story." Wiman claims to have had a mythical sense of God before he expressly acknowledged him. He denies a "bolt-from-the-blue revelation" that could be called a conversion. Hence his language is that of beliefs being built upon over time – evolving and deepening in response to life's course rather than suddenly sparking up from sheer absence.

"Faith in God is, in the deepest sense, faith in life," says Wiman, concluding then that, "even the staunchest life of faith is a life of great change." Such language might intimidate those who crave the easily chartable epiphanies – such as Oprah's "aha moments" of self-discovery or even breathless altar-call professions. To me, though, Wiman's confidence in faith as change was a refreshing change from the tidy arcs of before and after stories.

His book is not a theological treatise, either, where Wiman champions particular doctrines or offers an apologetic treatment of the denomination in which he, as an adult, found his spiritual home (the United Church). His frustrations over the language of belief ("sodden with overuse and imprecision") extend to mainline Christianity's many forms. So, too, does his exasperation with the apparent either/or distinction so many Christians make between mystical experience and dogma, instead of embracing both as vital elements of living faith.

But although Wiman is dismayed by the shape of faith in society, he is hopeful about the "visionary art" which seeks to answer the "burn of being" with truth and grace. Until recently he was editor of the venerable American magazine of verse, *Poetry*. So he naturally he pulls insight and inspiration most often from poetry. Featured poets include Osip Mandelstam, Richard Wilbur, George Herbert and several others. He also draws on the wisdom of thinkers such as Thomas Merton and Augustine and praises fiction's powerful capacity for "building a vocabulary of faith". He speaks of novelist Marilynne Robinson as a kind of modern prophet, able to capture the natural and the brimming eternal in a single passage. His own sparely eloquent poems are excerpted as well.

When Wiman juxtaposes the work of these authors along with the unease and ecstasies stirring in his own soul, they reveal his view that spiritual yearning is itself evidence for divine love. He sees a beautiful logic in Herbert's assertion, for example, that "the very permanence of our longing is proof of longing's eventual fruition" and in the Robinson passage that speak to the promise that "everything will be made whole."

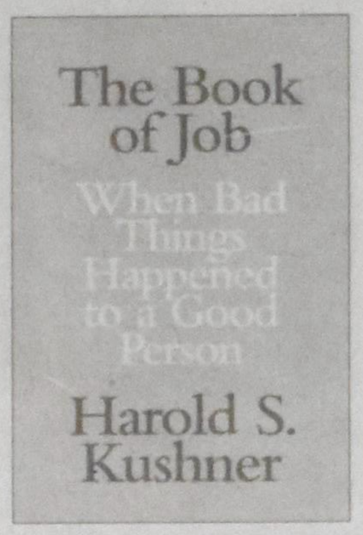
As Wiman's diseased body betrays him – even as it radiates with agony – he does not let his suffering exile him into an abyss of utter meaninglessness. He is haunted by the very real, if complicated, presence of Christ, whose suffering "shatters the iron wall around individual suffering" and makes human love possible. For Wiman, no other belief system makes sense except that which has, at its source, a Christ that "won't go away" – who suffers with us, and is able to carry both the intensities of our joy and our sorrow.

The spiritual acuity of *My Bright Abyss* comes from its honest, undaunted articulations of longing. "I have come back, for now, even hungrier for God, for Christ, for all the difficult bliss of this life I have been given," he says. "But there is great weariness too. And fear. And fury."

At the close of his meditation, Wiman is still a modern believer with deep wonderings and wants – but he does not hunger without hope. Instead he prays and writes and ponders all that he longs for. This dreadfully beautiful book reminds the spiritually "hungry" that we are, even now, in ascension season. It is a work of visionary art that invites us to live in and through Christ's wounds as we lift our difficult bliss up to God.

Adele Konyndyk is a creative writer living in Hamilton, Ont. To read more of her work, please visit ***adelekonyndyk.wordpress.com****.*

Complaint and comfort in the *Book of Job*



The Book of Job: When Bad Things Happened to a Good Person
by Harold Kushner
Nextbook; 2012, 202 pages.

Brian Bork

"Had Job not complained against God, he would not be counted among the greatest of the pious," claims Harold Kushner early on in *The Book of Job: When Bad Things Happened to a Good Person*. The title of this work evokes his earlier minor classic *When Bad Things Happen to Good People,* written in the wake of his fourteen year-old son's death from progeria.

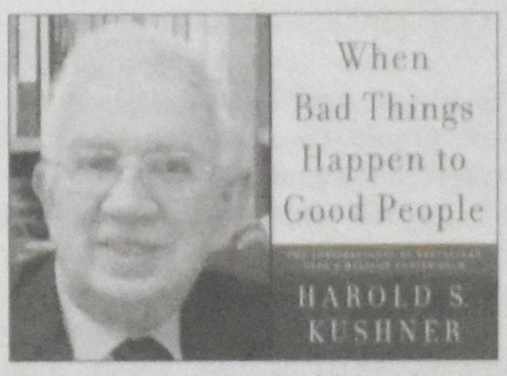
The book of Job is a major classic of world literature, a vexing chronicle of a good man's suffering, his friends' theological consolations, and his face to face encounter with the God who allowed it all to happen on the back of a wager with Satan. As I say, vexing. Yet Kushner's approach to the book is appropriately reverent and learned. He's clearly acquainted himself with ancient and recent scholarship on the subject, both from Jewish and Christian sources, and he illuminates the mysteries of the text with warmth and understanding.

Kushner contends that the book of Job is actually two books. Its introduction and conclusion compose "the fable" of Job, which is a fairly pious and simple story of faith challenged and rewarded. Within the confines of the fable, however, is "the poem" of Job, a much more complicated and theologically significant work. The poem is Kushner's preoccupation in this book; in it he locates the heart of the story of Job, and its most significant theological (and anthropological) insights.

The heart of the story is Job's complaint, his aching and earnest questioning of why such a calamity has befallen him. His friends arrive on the scene to console him, and they try to hash out just how this state of affairs could've come about. They speculate that Job isn't as righteous as he suspects, and that he's received his due. Then they counsel him to relinquish his complaint, offering as a pious example the sages who had faith in God's goodness. They also point out that God's wisdom is far greater than Job's, and maybe Job should just clam up and accept the circumstances, since they likely exceed his understanding anyway.

"Truly the ear tests arguments as the palate tests food," replies Job to his friends. He finds their arguments learned yet insufficient, and Kushner enjoins the same to his readers. Job chooses "the truth of real life over the comfortable illusion of traditional belief," writes Kushner. That's a provocative point, to be sure, especially for those of us in a doctrine-heavy tradition. Kushner wants his readers to ponder how personal experience affirms, transforms or even refutes inherited doctrine. Are the things we say about God useful in the abstract, or is the truth of theology proven in the way it interacts with and describes the messiness of human experience?

Kushner wants his readers to be alert to the ways suffering and grief foster an "estrangement from language." Our minds are exhausted by the effort to make sense of the inexplicable, he says, and that becomes abundantly clear in the increasingly incoherent and confusing conversation between Job and his friends in chapters 24-27. Words stumble, stutter and fall short; the conversation ends, save for the arrival of the Johnny-come-lately Elihu, who feels it necessary to rehash some shopworn theology.



Kushner sees the book of Job as having two parts – the fable and the poem.

Then the Lord replies to Job out of a whirlwind. God shows up sounding like a cosmic David Attenborough, describing all manner of flora and fauna, leaving Job feeling overmatched and overwhelmed. On first glance the divine discourse seems decidedly beside the point, but Kushner says there's a deeper logic behind it, especially that soliloquy about the behemoth and leviathan. Something about the deep order of creation is revealed in God's words, and they offer at least a partial answer to the vexing question of why this world so often lends itself to tragedy.

The coda of Kushner's book is a quick trip through the history of Jewish commentary on Job, and culminates in the Rabbi's own thoughts about what it might mean to see God's presence in the midst of a wounded creation. "I have met God . . . more often in the shadows, not in the elegant perfection of the world, but in the resilience of the human soul, the ability of people to find even a pain-filled life, even a grossly unfair life, worth living." For Kushner, even the throes of vertiginous grief can be the site of God's revelation, and somehow, someway, that suffering is transfigured by his presence. Could a Christian theologian have said it better?

Brian is CC's Review Editor and a CRC chaplain at the University of Waterloo and Wilfrid Laurier University.

Features

Project Rachel offers post-abortive hope and healing

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

On Feb. 23, 2013, I had the privilege of hearing Teresa Hartnett, Executive Director of Hamilton Birthright Pregnancy Services, speak at the St. Catharines Right to Life annual dinner. Besides working at Birthright, Teresa has chaired the Sexual Health Network in Hamilton, Ont. since 2001. In 2003, she founded a chapter of Project Rachel, an international post-abortion healing ministry, in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Hamilton. *Christian Courier* interviewed Hartnett to learn more about the struggles of post-abortive women and their families, and how God is healing people through Project Rachel.

Birthright, Hamilton, Ont.

Please tell us about Project Rachel.

Project Rachel is a ministry of reconciliation and healing for men and women who have had a past abortion experience. It seeks to engage all whose lives have been affected by the loss of a child through abortion. For some, the choice of having an abortion has left them feeling disconnected from those around them. For others, having to live with the choices made by a loved one is a source of great pain, profound loss or even anger.

Project Rachel seeks to help them heal from these pains. Trained counselors help those in need work through the pain of their abortion experience. They walk through the grief together, allowing the abortion to be felt and the pain to be felt. Its intent is to offer a sense of hope and the ability to go on without mental or emotional pain.

How did God lead you to found a chapter of Project Rachel?

It's a long story, but one that proves God's plans for us can't go unfulfilled. At my first conference for Birthright when I took over as Executive Director 25 years ago, the founder of Project Rachel spoke and I knew we needed a Project Rachel in Hamilton. At Birthright, I had already seen too many women in pain after an abortion not to know this. Over the next years, I asked several people to start a Project Rachel. Although they agreed that we needed it, they were too busy. Fifteen years later, I was hired to work in the Hamilton Diocese Family Ministry Office. The first task on my plate was to start a Project Rachel, which I had again suggested a few months before I was hired. God was patient – and Project Rachel is alive and well in the Hamilton Diocese.

Teresa Hartnett, Director, Family Ministry Office, The Roman Catholic Diocese of Hamilton.

Why do women choose to have abortions?

There are many reasons that a woman feels she must have an abortion. She feels afraid of anyone finding out, especially her parents. She doesn't feel support from her partner, friends, parents and others. She feels that her future will be forever lost and that she must choose between her own life and that of her baby. She is pressured into the decision by the medical community because of her age (too young or too old), socioeconomic status, or medical concerns (proven or not).

How are women affected?

There is an aftermath to abortion. Most women are ill-prepared for the feelings they have because they hear so much about abortion being a woman's right, but they don't hear about the experience of post-abortive women. Here's what we know. Bereavement experts have determined that most people involved with abortion experience the symptoms of grief and, therefore, need to learn to grieve the loss of the child. Many studies have found that those experiencing an abortion will turn to various methods to block the pain, such as drinking, drugs, promiscuous behaviour, having another child or cutting. Many are in denial for many years so they can feel safe from bad feelings. Moving out of denial can be very difficult. Some women isolate themselves from all those who remind them of their abortion, so they lose personal supports. Many also have trouble sleeping and don't eat properly.

Are others affected?

Many others are affected. Anyone connected in any way can feel the pain of the abortion, but most often it is those closest to the woman: the father, grandparents, other relatives, friends, people who tried to help stop the abortion, and also those who actually assisted with the abortion. Some studies are suggesting that future children also suffer as a result of an abortion if they find out about an aborted sibling.

How can post-abortive women and others affected by abortion experience healing?

One way is through Project Rachel, but many also find support through their faith communities, by learning to forgive themselves and by seeking counselling. The problem with some counselling can be that counsellors will not recognize abortion as a trigger for difficulties and so they provide support for the symptoms, but not the cause. As a result, women don't find peace.

Is the ministry exclusively for Catholics, or are clergy, counsellors and clients from other Christian denominations, such as the Reformed faith community, also involved?

The ministry is for all people and denominations, both in terms of providing support to those in need and in terms of training and counselling. We welcome all denominations for training since we get calls from people of all faiths and it is nice to be able to refer them to a person from their own faith when they call.

Have women who have been helped through Project Rachel taken steps to help other women suffering post-abortive stress?

Some tell me they are going to and I know in other places they have done so. However, with Project Rachel in the Hamilton Diocese we have not yet completed that circle. I have no doubt we will though.

What can Christians do to cultivate a culture that celebrates and promotes life?

God calls us to build a culture of life in our churches, our homes, our work places and our communities. In 1996, Pope John Paul II said, "Today everyone must be committed supporters of life. This commitment must pervade the social and cultural fabric, it must penetrate human ways of thinking, judging and acting, so that in the acceptance and protection of life, the beauty of self-giving to others may be rediscovered."

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema (sonyavf55@hotmail.com) is a freelance writer living in St. Catharines, Ont.

Rooted in God's restoration narrative

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Gail MacLauren, Executive Director of Elisha House Pregnancy and Family Support Centre in Welland, Ontario, can relate to the biblical Joseph. His jealous brothers threw him in a pit, then sold him into slavery, forever changing his life. But God empowered Joseph to overcome many obstacles and to become second-in-command to Pharaoh. Prior to a famine, Joseph managed a massive system of food storage. When he met his brothers who had come to Egypt to buy food, he understood that, though they had intended to harm him, "God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives" (Gen. 50:20).

Gail's journey is similar to Joseph's in two ways. Unjust decisions made by others forever changed her life. But now, at Elisha House, God is using her and others to save the lives of unborn children.

In 1973, 15-year-old Gail was admitted to McMaster Hospital in Hamilton, Ont. She says, "I lay in a small white room surrounded by doctors and nurses wearing masks and gowns. 'How did I end up here? What are they going to do to me?' These were my questions. Yet in some strange way, I was also comforted to know something was going to be done about my problem."

Gail had grown up in a seemingly normal home, yet, behind the façade, her parents' alcoholism, gambling and marital problems, as well as poor parenting skills, led to marital and family breakdown. Lonely and confused, Gail searched for meaning in the words of current rock songs. At 14, she had begun to smoke cigarettes and pot, and hang out with older boys. She says, "One night I got into a car with a

*See **Restoration narrative**, p. 11*

Features

From argument to love in action

Mary Ann Benjamins

Unplanned is Abby Johnson's story. Not so much the story about a woman who worked as the director of a Planned Parenthood clinic and then crossed over to the opposite camp, Campaign Life Coalition, but the story of a woman who sincerely wanted to help other women in crisis. Abby's story opens when, as the clinic's director, she steps in to lend a hand in her first ultrasound-assisted abortion. The visceral image of a 13-week unborn child wriggling to escape the abortionist's vacuum flashes on the screen in front of her. In that instant Abby is changed. The child, in a David and Goliath struggle, succumbs. The groggy mother, lying on the table, is blind to the lifelong consequences of her actions. Mother and child are caught up in a battle they don't understand and can't win unless people like Abby take up their cause.

Loved from one side to the other.

Abby was still a junior in university on her first day as a volunteer with Planned Parenthood. Driving into the clinic parking lot she was struck by the six foot high fence encircling the building. Staff gathered in the clinic, prepping volunteers on how to whisk potential clients safely inside. Outside that same fence, a group of protesters lined up, intent on saving unborn children. One was dressed as the Grim Reaper armed with a scythe. Another carried a poster with the grotesque image of an aborted baby, and still another lofted a poster spelling out MURDERERS in blood-red letters. She heard someone yell, "Abortionists are murderers! Repent!" Another softer voice called, "We're here because we care about you," but this voice was muted by the angry accusations. Abby, who had recently faced the trauma of an unplanned pregnancy and had "taken care" of the problem with an abortion, looked at the grim placards and then into the anxious faces of women in crisis. "How could this be helpful or appealing to women who were scared and desperate?" she writes. She made a simple choice. "My cause – helping women in crisis – was just, I believed, and they [the pro-lifers] were the ones opposing the just cause."

Though perhaps well-intentioned, the means by which the pro-lifers' message was conveyed had less than its desired effect. Paul Swope in his article, "Abortion: A Failure to Communicate" (**firstthings.com**), underscores the problem: "While we may not agree with how women currently evaluate this issue, the importance of our mission and the imperative to be effective demand that we listen, that we understand and that we respond to the actual concerns of women who are most likely to choose abortion." The crux of Abby Johnson's story is this: learn to look with love and compassion at *all* who are involved in the abortion debate. She goes out of her way to reveal the love, nurture and caring that many of the Planned Parenthood staff had for their clients. There are no monsters here. Instead, there are just people who, though they may be misguided, are trying in their own way to bless others around them, intervening when their clients are overwhelmed as parents or offering counsel following abuse and trauma. "We all long for a story that shows that 'our' side is right and good, and 'their' side is wrong and bad, don't we?" she says. "But I testify that there is good and right and wrong on both sides of the fence."

On her blog (**abbyjohnson.org**), Abby asks, "Are we pro-life, or just pro-birth? Do we only care about the babies, or do we care about everyone involved? If we say we are truly pro-life, then we must desire and yearn for conversion in every clinic worker and abortionist. Their lives are just as important as their children who are aborted. Are we committed to the sanctity of all human life, or just some?" Paul Swope agrees: "The pro-life movement's own self-chosen slogans and educational presentations have tended to exacerbate the problem, as they focus almost exclusively on the unborn child, not the mother." Abby knows that those who work on the other side are often motivated by the same compassion as those with whom she now aligns herself. The shocking truth, she points out, is: "We have far more in common with the 'other' side than we might imagine."

Loved from one side to the other

Abby Johnson offers a unique perspective from both sides of the debate. What finally prompted her to cross to the pro-life side of the fence? She testifies, "I was loved from one side onto the other." That very first day she volunteered at the clinic, one lone protester spoke kindly to her. That pro-lifer spent the next eight years building a relationship with her, laying a groundwork of friendship.

Abby's candid story does not offer clever or pat answers. Her story of brokenness may be uncomfortable for some pro-lifers. She leaves behind the rhetoric that emanates from both pro-life and pro-choice literature and she does not hide her feelings or her failings. *Unplanned* is not a pleasant read, but it is a gripping account revealing the sin and grace that lives in people on both sides of the debate. She offers her journey as a testimony to the grace of God. And isn't it just like God to take her story of brokenness and use it to move us from argument to love in action?

Mary Ann Benjamins is a supply teacher, writer and Awards Manager for The Word Guild. *Her story about her cancer survival can be found in* A Second Cup of Hot Apple Cider: Words to Stimulate the Mind and Delight the Spirit.

Restoration narrative *continued from p. 10*

guy. He parked the car and all I remember was him on top of me in the front seat. As time passed, I became suspicious that I was pregnant after I missed several menstrual cycles. My cousin and I took the bus to the Hotel Dieu Hospital in St. Catharines where I had a test that confirmed I was pregnant. During those weeks, I was consumed with fear. I knew this pregnancy would not simply go away, but how I wished it would! We told my aunt, who suggested that my mom come over. I don't recall her exact words but the sense was one of disappointment. I felt like I was a no good, dirty tramp, and now I was going to pay for what I had done."

A life forever changed

Gail knew that her life was forever changed. She says, "I recall sitting in a board room with my parents, the doctor and others. The conversation was being recorded and decisions were being made. All I can picture is a little girl, her hands folded in her lap, with a fearful look on her face, sitting in a chair and big people surrounding her and talking about her. Later, my mother told me that I was going to have an abortion. She gave me no other choice. She told me I was too young, that I had a future ahead of me, my education and that she was not going to raise "my kid." And, if we adopted, I would only be looking for "it" for the rest of my life."

When the abortion took place, the doctor explained the procedure to Gail. "He told me that he was inserting a big long needle into my belly, drawing out the amniotic fluid. Then he would replace it with a saline solution. This solution would burn and take the life of the baby. Later that night, I delivered a 16-week-old dead baby boy. The nurse wrapped him up in a disposable sheet and took him away. It was never talked about in our house except to throw it back in my face."

Gail's life spiralled downward into abuse of alcohol, drugs, sex and partying – "all the while this was going on and after, my feelings were frozen," she says. At 17, she was pregnant again and made the appointment on her own to have an abortion, overriding her boyfriend's objections.

During the next few years, rocky relationships characterized Gail's life. But God hadn't forgotten his child. While living in Thunder Bay, Ont., Gail was invited to a Bible study. She says, "The love in the room that first night was something I had never experienced in my life. At the next study night, I wholeheartedly accepted Jesus Christ as the Lord of my life, realizing what he had done for a wretched sinner like me."

Gail MacLauren, Executive Director of Elisha House Pregnancy and Family Support Centre.

In 2003, after living in Thunder Bay for 20 years, Gail returned to the Niagara region and worked as a Public Health Inspector in the Welland area. She says, "I kept driving down Burgar St. in Welland seeing this place called Elisha House Pregnancy and Family Support Centre. It triggered something deep inside of me. Not knowing just what they did, I knew I needed to go inside. It took me two more months until I got the courage to go in. I asked general questions about what they did. I got more specific and asked the counselor if there was help for women who had experienced abortions. She said they had a Post-Abortion Biblical Healing Group based on the book *Forgiven and Set Free* by Linda Cochrane. Thirty years' worth of tears came pouring out of me as I said, 'Now I know why I needed to come in here. Please sign me up for the next group.'"

Restored relationship with the Father

She continues, "I came to Elisha House not being able to express my feelings, especially regarding my abortions. I then began to realize that at the time of my abortions, I was unable to stand up for my children or myself. I was numb. I felt compelled like an animal in a trap, pushed, forced, and coerced. At the same time, I felt I was a coward for not stopping the madness and saying, 'NO WAY! This is my child, my body!' All of this was made worse by taking the lives of my children when deep down I knew it was wrong. Although there was no Elisha House around when I was challenged by a crisis pregnancy, I thank God that they were there with biblical counselling for a broken Christian woman who needed to learn where her healing and true identity lies – in Christ alone. He set me free from the denial, shame, guilt, pain, sadness, anger and grief for the two children I never knew. I carried all of this mess for so many years and now I can truly have a restored and shameless relationship with my Father. Through him, I have been able to forgive those involved."

As God did with the biblical Joseph, he will continue to fulfill his purposes through Gail's work at Elisha House, and many more lives will be saved.

Features

'Even so, it is well with my soul'

Sara and her mom, Nell DeJonge, 1997 (above). Sara and Rachel, 2013 (below). The Pot family, 2012 (right).

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

How does one make room in one's life for God, for others and for self? On April 20, 2013, speakers at the Inspirational Women's Conference in Oakville, Ont. shared their answers to that question through stories and reflections. Sara Pot of St. Catharines, Ont. was one of them.

Sara and her husband Ralph are the parents of four children, two of whom have severe, undiagnosed disabilities. Candid, honest and refreshing, Sara's story was reminiscent of the psalmist's lament and wrestling match with God in Psalm 13 – "How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?" Hers wasn't a story smoothed over with Christian platitudes and cheap answers. It was raw and realistic, yet ultimately rooted in faith in God, who also allowed the patriarch Jacob to wrestle with him. As with Jacob, Sara and Ralph have wrestled with God and been blessed by him.

"I have difficulty accepting change," Sara told the audience of 750 women. "But over the years, my life has taken a direction that I wouldn't have chosen – a new normal that is of God's design, not mine."

Less than three months after Sara and Ralph were married in March 1997, Sara's mother, 52-year-old Nell DeJonge, was killed by an impaired driver. Sara said, "Mom was home, and home was Mom. When Mom was promoted to glory, I lost both my mother and the sense of home. You talk about making room for God – at that point, my room for God began to look like a wrestling pad. I couldn't swallow the fact that Mom was gone and that life would be forever changed. I beat the chest of God, asking why this had to happen."

'It is well . . . '

Sara cherishes one comforting memory from that time. The week of her mother's death, Sara and other family members retrieved personal items from the destroyed van. "I came across a cassette tape still stuck in the cassette player. I managed to pull it out and brought it home. Later, when some of us were gathered together, we decided to play the tape to see what Mom might have been listening to when the van was hit. Suddenly, the living room was filled with song: 'O Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight, the clouds be rolled back as a scroll; the trump shall resound and the Lord shall descend; even so, it is well with my soul.'"

By the summer of 2005, Sara had begun to square her loss and sorrow with the reality of a loving God. By that time, Emily and Sophia had been born. The family moved from Minnesota to St. Catharines. Sara enrolled in graduate school, and Ralph taught at a Christian school.

Not 'well'

Their life took a dramatic turn when Sara became pregnant again. "At first, the idea of another baby was exciting," Sara said. "But on March 11, 2006, I lay on a cold table in the ultrasound department, watching the eyebrows of the technician furrow and deepen. An hour later, Ralph and I were sitting at another cold table with a genetics team. We were presented with several 'options' for our baby girl. You see, she was now considered 'malformed,' with a long list of 'anomalies.' One of the options included terminating her life."

Eight weeks later on May 4, 2006, several trauma teams gathered with a labour and delivery team, ready to do all they could to save Rachel's life. "I've heard and read that the way we can make God laugh is to tell him our plans," Sara reflected. "But that statement bothers me. I don't think God was laughing when he heard Ralph and me planning and praying for strength and a miracle before May 4. I don't think he was laughing as the trauma teams worked furiously to revive and stabilize Rachel."

Sara recalled her emotions after the medical team and Ralph accompanied Rachel to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. "I was alone in the delivery room. That wrestling mat came out and my room for God became messy – tears of sadness, anger and fear overwhelmed me. It was not well with my soul."

Yet Sara continued to believe that God is faithful. In fact, she knew that God accepted all her emotions and that he would never let her go. When Sara and Ralph took Rachel home from the hospital, they worked hard to create a new normal, despite feelings of desperation as they contemplated their infant's care. "There is no expert to help guide you through the abnormal routine," Sara said. "For feeding, forget breast vs. bottle. Rather, how do I operate the feed pump? Yes, there were nurses to come and provide assistance, but we quickly learned that they knew only as much as their experience. I had to figure out things like changing a g-tube – taking a device out of a hole in my child's stomach and replacing it with a new one."

Church volunteers and nurses lightened the family's daily load. Also, home renovations to make it more accessible were carried out by a valued team of church friends and family.

In 2008, Sara became pregnant with Janneke Grace. Rachel's genetics team had told Sara and Ralph that they could find no specific link or syndrome that might lead to the birth of another special needs child. "Our ultrasounds suggested a healthy baby girl," Sara said. "We thought, 'Will her birth be a redeeming experience, a chance to resolve the sorrow of Rachel's birth?'"

After what Sara described as a fearful, traumatic delivery, Janneke Grace was born on March 14, 2009. Ultrasounds taken during pregnancy had missed what was now so painfully clear – Janneke's physical characteristics were exactly like Rachel's. A complete surprise.

Sara told the hushed audience, "There was silence in that birthing room for several minutes, stifling our joy over the birth of another daughter. I am still thankful to this day that our midwives respected our sorrow with their silence. They were incredibly Christ-like without saying a word. Ralph and I wept. We sobbed like we had never cried before. I couldn't even wrestle with God. I lay on that wrestling pad, soaked it in tears again, and waited."

According to Sara, parenting special needs children is an ongoing grief, though that doesn't mean she and her family are continually sad.

Dogged desire to find joy

Today, 7-year-old Rachel and 4-year-old Janneke light up the lives of their family with their smiles and cheery personalities. "Rachel is very animated and loves music. Janneke can appear very serious, but once the music starts, she too gets excited. She yells and spins around in her walker. Both Rachel and Janneke are smothered in love by their big sisters."

And the family receives ongoing support. Daytime nurses give Sara a break to take care of daily tasks. On week days, respite workers provide help with getting Rachel and Janneke ready for school and for bed.

"Maybe it looks like we can handle it," Sara said. "But, this is all about God handling it."

Sara pointed out that God's design for her life is a daily challenge which involves either choosing for joy or the alternative. She isn't oblivious to sorrow, frustration, envy or anger, but she doesn't allow those feelings to supplant her dogged desire to find joy.

Sara reflected on the song she and other family members listened to years ago after her mother's death. "I like to think that 'even so' means 'even so' right now while we wait; 'even so' with tube feedings, hospital appointments and difficult decisions; 'even so' as I wrestle with a God who loves me, but who has called me to this new normal; 'even so' I will learn that waiting fuels my faith; 'even so' I will learn to be content in my circumstances."

(Read more about Sara's family at **thepotfamily.blogspot.ca**)

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema (sonyavf55@hotmail.com) is a freelance writer living in St. Catharines, Ont.

Columns

From the 11th Province

Marian Van Til

A 'new song': a child's churchly entertainment forges a career path

Some mainline churches hold services *sans* music. Every prayer, lesson, response, creed, homily is read or recited. Such services occur when few people are present: early Sunday morning (before the main service), or of an evening. Even so, as someone from an extended family of musicians and for whom musical praise, prayer and lament early became the potent and wondrous life-blood of worship, I find that kind of worship incomprehensible.

In my hometown Christian Reformed Church, the little kids had Sunday school in the basement. To be allowed upstairs with the big people – when I could as yet barely read – was heady. I loved trying to sing with the adults, and quickly latched on to paging through the *Psalter Hymnal* (first the red, then the blue). It was blissful; a consuming exercise for a kid like me, and ever more so as it became clear that the minister who arrived when I was five seemed determined to stay in that church for the rest of his life.

This was long before the children's sermon era. If the sermon was beyond you, you had to find your own churchly entertainment, making your own "sermon," as it were. Doing that began my love affair with hymnals (not to mention my extensive collection).

Even at age five, Marian read the Psalter Hymnal *with pleasure.*

I taught myself what each index was about, silently guffawing, as children will, at the "weird" names I discovered (text writer Horatius Bonar led my list). I soon began to read the texts of the Psalms and hymns, working my way through the whole book. I discovered that good hymn texts are indeed poetry, giving them a potent, unique way of delivering the gospel. I also began to read the Catechism, and learned from my dad that the Heidelberg was the big, detailed confession on which the "compendium" we kids weekly studied and memorized was based. Eventually I read the entire *Canons of Dort* and the *Belgic Confession* too. And the three creeds, and baptismal and Lord's Supper liturgies. And then I started over. By age 13, I got the thrilling chance to be one of the organists, setting me on a path I've never left.

My dad had started me on piano lessons before I began school, so as I became more adept at reading music I was able to follow the tunes in my head, usually figuring out what the unknown ones sounded like. I had plenty of time to do all this each Sunday; the sermons ran 40-45 minutes. Over the years, as I exhausted the *Psalter Hymnal's* contents I could always turn, and often did, to reading a pew Bible – usually choosing exciting, graphic Old Testament stories.

New songs to the LORD

The CRC (with the RCA) has just come out with yet another hymnal (see my review on page 16). *Lift Up Your Hearts* is not a combined psalter and hymnal, but a hymnal that contains some Psalm settings. So the subtitle, *Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs,* is slightly misleading. The compilers obviously wanted to use that quote from Ephesians 5:19, apparently unworried that it might imply that Psalms make up the largest part of the book. They don't. In fact, there is no longer a "psalter," as such.

Still, there are Psalm-based gems here: strong tunes (some classic, some contemporary) set to fine modern poetry that captures the biblical essence of specific Psalms or Psalm sections. Some are repeated from the 1987 *Psalter Hymnal*, but many will be new to CRC members. Some encapsulate Psalms of praise, others versify Psalms of confession or lament.

In Psalm 40, David confesses, "I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit. . . . He put a new song in my mouth." *Lift Up Your Hearts* uses the Iona Community's setting (# 670). That community, now an ecumenical group not unlike Taizé, was founded in 1938 in Scotland (and the island of Iona) by Rev. George MacLeod. They've published a collection of simple, effective Psalm settings, some of which are included in *Lift Up Your Hearts*.

The Psalm 40 tune is NEW BRITAIN – what we know as "Amazing Grace." Using that tune gives the psalm additional layers of meaning, since that tune will *always* echo John Newton's grace-extolling hymn text. The combination is brilliant. It does create a powerful "new song," a moving acknowledgment of God's rescuing grace.

I waited patiently for God, for God to hear my prayer;
and God bent down to where I sank and listened to me there.

God raised me from the miry pit, from mud and sinking sand,
and set my feet upon a rock where I can firmly stand.

And on my lips a song was put, a new song to the Lord.
Many will marvel open-eyed and put their trust in God.

Great wonders you have done, O Lord, all purposed for our good.
Unable every one to name, I bow in gratitude.

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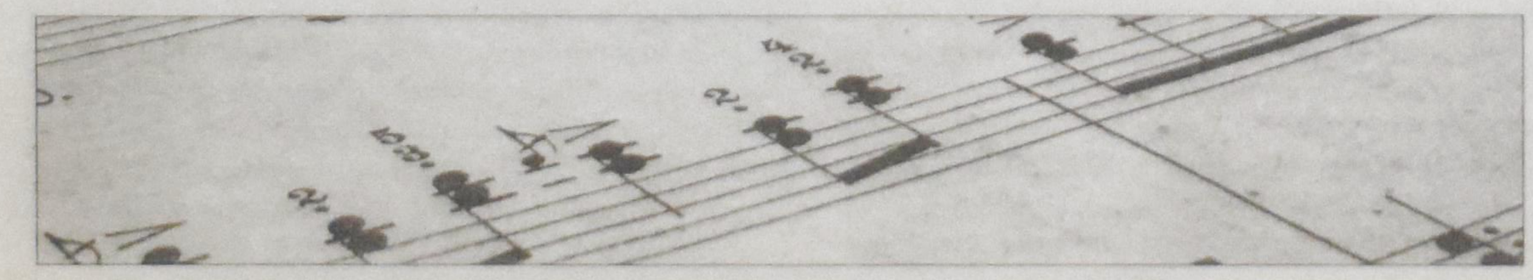


Artful Eye

WILLIAM HARRIS

Doors to the Future

There's nothing like a door to the future –
They're sold by the pallet at Menards:
The steel core, hollow core, antiqued and painted;
the plain front, cross-buck or classic fan light
Neo-Georgian; the smart timbered craftsman
for the suburban sophisticate; the swirled
frosted glass and its French curliques
for the incurably Romantic – yours
to make every exit an entrance; this stage
set for imagination, a market theatre
of absurd choice, where paint chips, hardware, doors,
and no-shadow light in a hundred designs
keep your back to the sliding door, the setting sun,
and the warmth of a summer, now just begun.

William Harris

William Harris lives in Grand Rapids where he helps his wife, writes the occasional poem and teaches speech at Cornerstone University.

Columns

Gathering Light

Emily Wierenga

To the CEO of Abercrombie and Fitch

Dear Mr. Mike Jeffries,

You've gotten a lot of flack lately, for comments you've made such as this one: "Candidly, we go after the cool kids. We go after the attractive all-American kid with a great attitude and a lot of friends. A lot of people don't belong [in our clothes], and they can't belong. Are we exclusionary? Absolutely," you said.

But I feel sorry for you.

I feel sorry because at the end of the day, you don't know the hurt you've inflicted, because you've never been so wounded that you starved yourself for four years. You've never been so picked on that you planned your outfits out, weeks in advance, so the kids would think you fit in – or, at least, so they wouldn't notice you. You've never felt so ugly that you spent hours squeezing your fingers around your wrists wondering when you'd be the perfect size. *Wondering when you would matter, to someone.*

What is your story, Mike Jeffries? Because all of us have one. And you've got this curl to your lip that makes me think that you're hiding something. Something deep and cutting, and maybe I'm wrong. Maybe something hurt you so badly that you created a multi-billion dollar company catering to the cool kids because it was the only way you knew to salvation. It was the only road you could take to find a name.

Who we are

We all do it. We all try to find that road. And we all want to be cool. We all want to matter. I see this in the blogging world too. I see the cool blogs and the way we try to fit in.

So many of us just don't say it. We don't say that, deep down, we believe that fat is bad, that the cool crowd is where we belong, and that being picked on is deserved.

You had the guts to say what you believed. Unfortunately, what you believe is wrong.

Because beauty is not a number. I know, because I got down to size zero. And it wasn't enough. I still cried myself to sleep every night.

I've gotten rid of my weigh scale. I shop at thrift stores because I don't want to support men like you. I am striving to make my blog nerdy again because for too long I tried to be cool. I had forgotten that Jesus said, the last shall be first.

Jesus pissed a lot of people off too, Mike. But not because he didn't like fat people. It's because he saw people's hearts and he called them for what they were. He saw the truth.

What is your story, Mike Jeffries? Because all of us have one.

And I'm looking at you, Mike, and I'm seeing a hurting boy, who hides behind fancy suits and a multi-billion-dollar career and secretly wonders when he'll feel like he matters.

And I hope you find him, Mike.

The God you've been desperately searching for, in all of your cocktail parties and high-priced collars. Because in spite of everything you've said and done, you're still dearly loved by him.

And because of that, I choose to love you too.

In Him Whose Name is the Only Brand Worth Wearing, Emily.

Emily Wierenga is the author of Chasing Silhouettes *and* Mom in the Mirror: Body Image, Beauty and Life After Pregnancy. *For more info, please visit* ***emilywierenga.com***.

Everyday Christian

Cathy Smith

My 'good deed' log

Cathy Smith

Did the title trigger a blip on your TULIP radar? Are familiar verses crossing your mind: ". . . all our righteous acts are like filthy rags" or "There is not one who does good, not even one?" Don't worry. I'm not about to argue with Scripture or Calvin (hence the quotes around "good deed").

My "good deed" log really exists. It originated, in fact, because the truth of those verses impacted me so profoundly. I was spiritually depressed. The challenges of teaching and parenting had left me depleted. My prayers seemed to vaporize unheeded. I was disappointed in the immoral conduct of Christian leaders. I was disappointed in myself. Decades after my profession of faith, I was still battling the same old sins: envy, talking too much (OK, gossip), being too opinionated (OK, pride). Where was that sanctification I'd learned about in catechism? I didn't see enough of it in others or myself. Pivotally, my Christian life was clearly not winsome enough to win those I loved to Christ. That's what was really killing me.

There were mornings when I didn't want to get out of bed or to go to church. Once upon a time I'd been more optimistic. I believed, and not glibly, that God would "turn to my good whatever adversity he sends me in this sad world." Now I was hanging on by bleeding fingernails, glaring balefully up at an inscrutable Divinity.

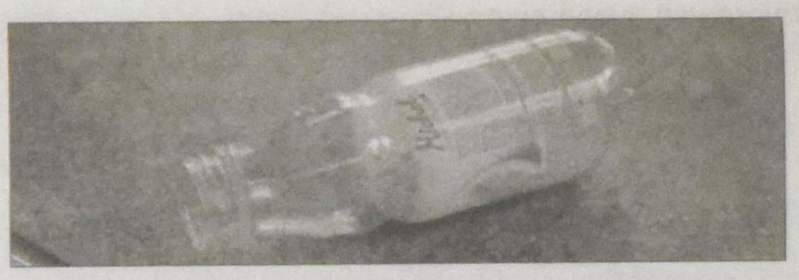
A gradual change in my attitude, a smallish miracle, hinged on two sentences. In *Disappointment with God*, Philip Yancey quotes Abraham Heschel: "**Faith like Job's cannot be shaken because it is the result of having been shaken**." That statement reverberated loudly in my hollowness. Yes! That's the kind of faith I wanted. The only thing worse than a straining faith in an incomprehensible God, I resolved, was no faith and no God at all. Disappointment with God was preferable to disappointment without him (and with that came a whole new appreciation of Yancey's clever title).

The other sentence came from *Listening to Your Life: Daily Meditations with Frederick Buechner*: "Sometimes when we are alone, thoughts come swarming into our heads like bees – some of them destructive, ugly, self-defeating thoughts, some of them creative and glad. Which thoughts do we choose to think, then, as much as we have the choice? Will we be brave today or a coward today? **Not in some big way probably but in some small foolish way, yet brave still.** Will we be honest today or a liar? Just some pint-sized honesty, but honest still."

The whimsy of "small foolish bravery" and "pint-sized honesty" appealed to my deflated spirit. From Yancey, a microscopic speck of resolute faith. From Buechner, a downsized sanctification – one small good deed a day. My log would be living proof that, although no Enoch, I still walked with God.

The list ranges from the pious to the ridiculous. Here's a brief excerpt:

gave blood
cleaned up after Seniors' Dinner
canvassed for diabetes
went to church to fix photocopier 3x
bulletin board at church
prayer partner for Serve
thank you note to Music Committee
engaged D. in conversation (merits the mention because it was like pulling teeth!)
picked up trash on my walk – a cardboard wrapper for a Playtex Super-Look Smooth-Fit No-Panty-Line Size M White Panty, two Bulk Barn flyers, and the cardboard package for a Leapfrog Activity Storybook: *Dora Goes to School* (windy blue box day)



Picking up litter is a small act of righteousness, a living "thank-you" note to God.

Incrementally, as I focused on the small good things I could do and not so much on the things I couldn't, as I traded in my to-do list for God for his to-do list for me, God began to look like himself again. Not the severe Sovereign who delegated impossibly herculean tasks to me like "win others to Christ" or "eradicate all sin from your life," but a faithful Father who ruled the world by his own "eternal counsel and providence," upon whose purview I'd been guilty of encroaching. Or, more likely, I was starting to look like myself again, finding a humility in my faith to replace humiliation.

The Heidelberg Catechism rightly teaches that good deeds are not payments on a salvation plan. They are living "thank you" notes to God for our redemption in Christ. I know that. But it's droll, isn't it, that two small sentences were the providential tools to aerate my tramped-down Reformed soul? Zechariah says, "Who dares despise the day of small things, since the seven eyes of the LORD that range throughout the earth will rejoice when they see the chosen capstone[a] in the hand of Zerubbabel?" Not me. I'm all about the day of small things.

Cathy Smith (cathy@christiancourier.ca) is Features Editor with CC. *She lives in Wyoming, Ont.*

Columns

Words from Wild Horses
Kenny Warkentin

Devotion, discipleship, discipline

What do you do when someone you know continues to fall into unhealthy patterns of behaviour? What do you do when you begin to question whether they are over-extending the grace given to them?

I ask these questions continually, especially when someone continues to fall prey to behaviours that are risky and lead to compromising situations.

When we encounter Jesus, we fall in love with him and his amazing gift to us. As the restorative process begins for all believers, we are drawn into this wonderful life of devotion to the Lord. He beckons us to come and dine with him in the midst of our painful memories, our areas of lack and our wayward life decisions. I like to use three words to describe what Jesus calls us into as we accept his invitation to live in us: devotion, discipleship and discipline.

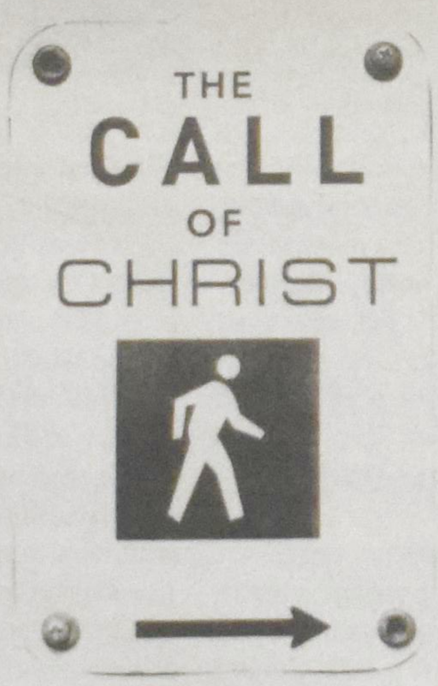
Let's use the analogy of playing in the park. Three friends go out and play in the park and they are told to play nicely with one another. Think of these friends as Devotion, Discipleship and Discipline. Each of them realizes the importance of one another's character and they join hands and explore, laugh and enjoy the moments. They realize that on their own they are good, but together they are great. Sometimes, however, in the midst of the playground, Devotion stumbles and falls, Discipleship wanders off and Discipline gets tired and lays down to rest.

I have recognized that there are countless men and women who have vast wells of pain and deep wounds, giving them difficulty with all three of these friends. Due to legitimate needs not being met (things they should have received or things they perceived while growing up), they have difficulty grasping love or understanding affirmation and affection. They often lack the ability to endure. These areas in their lives may take years to process and find some form of freedom in. This doesn't negate the fact that they are called to a life of devotion, discipleship and discipline; they just have so many factors of need that one or all three are difficult for them to grasp. In this place we are called to love them, pray for them and to patiently help them in the restorative process. I think of how many of these men and women feel like orphans, with the need to connect and find meaning and purpose, who feel a deep chasm of aloneness. Let's look at a certain scenario . . . .

To seek the lost

What do we do when someone who is gay accepts the Lord Jesus into their heart and he is married to his partner of 30 years, with children, property, investments? What do we do when, in the midst of his new devotion to Christ and realized through discipleship with others, he realizes that he is living in sin? The results are very messy. Who will care for someone making a bold decision like this? Are we, the body of Christ, going to love on people in the midst of the mess of their lives and help in any way? This is where grace abounds. People need an extreme measure of grace when they count the cost of discipline in their lives.

We are called to make disciples of all nations, to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ and to help bind up the broken, heal the sick and to bring release to the captives. This usually looks messy and requires patience, much grace and love. We don't get an instruction manual when someone comes to us looking for ministry. There are usually no clear answers and yet we can begin to see some familiar friends at play. Sometimes they need to know that Christ is inviting them to be devoted to him and he is calling them to come and play with him. In this place Jesus encourages them to see that they are being discipled. This means we are called to walk with others and to encourage them on in their spiritual journey with the Lord.



Needed: grace from fellow Christians as God transforms, restores and redeems each of us.

My heart is for the lost, the prodigals and the deeply broken, and my desire is that they encounter the Lord Jesus who can and will restore what the canker worms have eaten. My prayer is that broken people allow Jesus to transform, restore and redeem all things as they continue to journey, regardless of how many times they fall on their faces. So that they can begin to know just how much Jesus and the Father and the Holy Spirit love them.

Kenny is a writer, painter and photographer passionate about gender, sexuality, culture, community and how these pertain to the Body of Christ. Kenny enjoys getting his hands dirty in the garden and tries to get out golfing as much as possible. He lives in Winnipeg, Manitoba, with his wife Paula and their daughter, Phoebe, where he's working on his first book.

How can I support a good friend whose husband just died?

Getting Unstuck
Arlene Van Hove

Helping those who grieve

Q. I am 45 years old, married and a mother of three children, ages 14, 17 and 18. I also work two days a week at the local bank, as well as being involved at our church. The last 10 months have been filled with heartbreak. A friend's teenage son has gone blind from complications with diabetes. Another friend received a diagnosis of stage-four breast cancer, and is submitting to a rigorous treatment program. I have tried to be there for both of them. More recently, one of my best friends (a bit older than me, whose children have already left home) became a widow when her husband died in a horrendous traffic accident. I really want to support her in her sorrow but I am coming up empty. We have been friends for a long time and in the past she has been there for me on several occasions. I want to know how to recharge myself so that I can walk this road with her in a way that is helpful for her as well as myself.

A. My heart goes out to you as you try to work through the various sorrows of your life. When family or friends experience the losses you mention, it affects those who love them. And yes, it is possible you have too much on your plate and under the circumstances it is quite normal to feel you have nothing left to give. At the same time, you care about your friend and not getting involved would be an unhelpful reactive response so I want to commend you for wanting to be there for her.

First, accept that you have a lot on your plate and need to make some changes. Second, make a list of how you spend your time. Third, evaluate the list and make a priority list for this time in your life taking into considerations the needs of your family, your friends as well as your own. Decide what you want to let go so you will have some space for your best friend. When my mother became a widow, I was a mother of four and attending university myself. I changed my course load from going to campus three times a week to once a week. I also dropped church work for the time being. At the same time, you may want to take a look at how much time you spend on housework and think about hiring a cleaning lady for a few hours a week. Also, don't be afraid to evaluate how much time you spend with your first two grieving friends; it's possible they are managing fine without you. In other words, evaluate what you are doing with your time and how you may want to divide it according to your present needs, including your spouse and children.

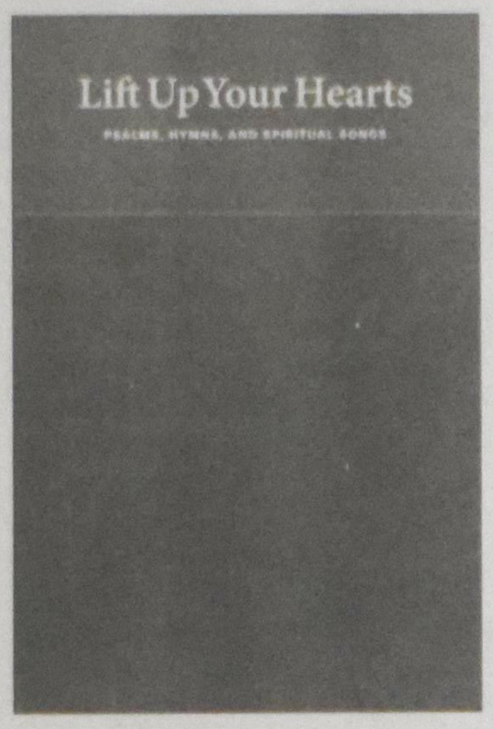
Fourth, I suggest you become aware of what re-charges you. Meeting some of your own needs will reap a healthy harvest of energy and an appreciative outlook on life. Ask yourself, have I felt this way before, and if so, what did I do about it that allowed me to regain my energy? Fifth, how you juggle feelings of sorrow about your friends' losses with feelings of appreciation and gratitude for your own life is key in keeping you emotionally healthy. For myself, again while I was helping to care for my aging mother during the last years of her life, I could identify with a quote written by Melody Beattie:

Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order and confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today and creates a vision for tomorrow.

You may want to find one of your own that fits with you or search Scripture for a text that is not only comforting or uplifting but also gives a helpful framework for where you are in your life at this point in time. I pray and hope for strength and courage on your part.

Arlene Van Hove (avanhove@shaw.ca) is a therapist and member of the Fleetwood CRC in Surrey, B.C.

A new hymnal's hits and misses



Lift Up Your Hearts: Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Faith Alive, 2013. 1094 pp. $20.59 Cdn/$19.99 US (pew ed.).

Marian Van Til

Lift Up You Hearts is the new hymnal that the Christian Reformed Church expects will replace the 1987 Psalter Hymnal and the Reformed Church in America's *Rejoice in the Lord*, since it was a joint project of the two denominations.

Worship experts note the finiteness of modern hymnals. Faith Alive asserts "the lifespan of a hymnal is about the same as that of a good roof – about 20 years. After two decades, both begin to show their age." That's stated as a fact, but I contest the notion. (The best shingles today, by the way, are guaranteed for 30 years, killing algae all the while!) If we can't come up with "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" durable enough to hold up to a mere two decades of use, perhaps we're looking at the wrong stuff. Church music needn't occupy a pop hit chart whose contents fade with the whims of its distracted modern audience. The best Christian contemporary music suitable for congregational singing had better be good enough to last far longer than 20 years. Thankfully, most of the CCM included here is of that durable sort. Still relevant hymnody and psalmody has centuries-long roots. Faith Alive's roofing analogy aside, this hymnal does reflect that history. There are many pieces hymn-lovers will recognize, and numerous classic hymns absent from the Psalter Hymnal have been borrowed from other Christian traditions. However, the unique psalmody of the Reformation, including the best Genevan tunes, has all but been abandoned.

That's a huge loss. The 150 Psalms – which encompass the breadth and depth of our human experience before God – are the Bible's "songbook," and the earliest basis of Reformed church music. I don't mean there are no Psalms here. Out of the 965 numbers (about 80 of which are spoken litanies, prayers, "reflections," etc.) there are 200-plus that use Psalm-based texts. But you need to look at the Scripture Index to find them, as they don't appear together as Psalms. And some Psalms are excluded and many are incomplete. (The inclusion of all content of all 150 Psalms is a unique, invaluable feature of the 1987 Psalter Hymnal.)

There's one other blatant omission. The Heidelberg Catechism is gone (except for a few key Qs & As). And so are the other Reformed doctrinal standards. The CRC still purportedly bases its theology and scripture interpretation on these, and they're supposed to help guide us in holy living, so I can see no acceptable reason for omitting them. That will only further erode their use and importance. They are available separately, but that doesn't solve the problem.

The organizing scheme is unusual but very workable once you see where it's going. If what you're looking for does elude you, the comprehensive indices should solve the problem. The book has two main parts, broken down into many headings and subheadings. Part One looks like this: Old Testament Life & Witness: – Creation & Providence; – Fall & Human Condition; – God's Covenant Faithfulness. Advent Expectation. Christ's Life: – Christmas; – Epiphany [etc. …]; Joining the Spirit's Work: – Through the Church; – In Culture, Communities, & Nations; – In Family & Relationship; – In our Walk with God. Trusting the Triune God: – In Grateful Living; – In Marking Time; – In Difficult Times; – In Death & Dying. Hope for Things to Come: – Christ's Second Coming; – The New Heaven & Earth.

Part Two, "Worshipping the Triune God," fills in Sunday's liturgy: Opening of Worship: – Called & Gathered; – Praise & Adoration. Called to Be Holy: – Confession & Lament; – Forgiveness & Grace; – God's Gift of the Law; – Dedicated to Holy Living. Hearing the Word. Creeds and Confessions (these are songs, except the Nicene Creed text). Receiving the Sacraments: – Baptism; – The Lords' Supper. Living Our Baptism: – Offering Our Lives; – Offering Our Gifts; – Offering Our Prayers. Sent Out: – Charge & Blessing; – Doxology & Short Refrain.

There's much very fine content here, of broad musical scope. Buy the book, but don't ditch your gray Psalter Hymnals! The two together will make up the best body of Reformed worship music, confessions, creeds and liturgical forms available.

Marian Van Til began playing the organ in her home-town CRC at age 13. She has worked in many denominations and is now the music director at Trinity Lutheran, East Amherst, NY. Along the way she studied many aspects of church music as part of her B.A. and M.A. in music history.

Adolescent depression and suicide: What can Christians do?

Debbie Davis

On May 10, Prime Minister Stephen Harper attended a cyber-bullying forum in Winnipeg. Joining him were the parents of several Canadian teens who committed suicide after being bullied through social media.

According to the Canadian Mental Health Association, suicide is the second highest cause of death for youth aged 10 to 24 in Canada, following by accidents defined as "unintentional injuries" by Statistics Canada (2009). On average, 294 youths die from suicide each year. Many more attempt it.

The news seems full of their stories: Matthew Warren, Ashley Smith and Rehtaeh Parsons. What types of teens are vulnerable to suicide? What resources are available for adolescents and their parents? What can Christian communities do to reduce the risk? This article will attempt to address these questions.

Depression

Based on the media reports, it seems that Matthew Warren, son of popular American evangelical Pastor Rick Warren, suffered from a prolonged history of clinical depression. Depression is a mental disorder which causes chemical imbalances in the brain, leading to despondency, lethargy or general apathy. Pastor Warren wrote, ". . . in a momentary wave of despair, at his home, Matthew took his life." He was 27. At this age, most young adults are completing the developmental life task of building a career and launching out on their own. It is possible that this felt too daunting for Matthew.

Matthew Warren memorial.

Victims of sexual trauma

Rehtaeh Parsons was a young woman whose sexual trauma was exacerbated through the digital trail left by the alleged assailants. Her entire family felt powerless after the police decided not to lay charges. If a teen is sexually assaulted, he or she ought to be checked out medically and receive specialized counseling, preferably from a therapist who is trained in treating Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and recognizes the spiritual damage that is sustained as a result of sexual violence.

Seemingly 'normal'

Some teen suicides appear to defy logic. These adolescents are popular, have lots of friends, do well in school, have various hobbies and supportive families. This type of adolescent tends to be described by others as sensitive, caring and advanced in their cognitive and spiritual thinking. The current literature offers little information about this group. Perhaps these teens do not yet have the emotional coping skills to deal with advanced cognitive perspectives on life.

Treatment options

It is imperative to take suicidal behavior seriously. Youth who attempt suicide and do not receive the appropriate care are at very high risk. They need the reassurance that somebody cares. The topic of suicide needs to be addressed in a direct manner. In most cities, telephone counseling and suicide hotlines are available, as well as school guidance counselors and psychological counseling. Guidance counselors, however, are not trained in the area of suicidal ideation and school social workers are often too busy to engage in preventative care.

Preventative strategies

A must-read for all parents is a best-selling book called *Hold On To Your Kids* by Dr. Gordon Neufeld, a Vancouver-based developmental psychologist whose model of attachment makes sense of complex problems. Teens need opportunities to relate to people of all ages in order to be able to place peer pressure into proper perspective. Children must be respected and included in the worship service. One church, located in Hamilton, uses children to complete part of the responsive readings. If you are a Sunday school teacher, cultivate these relationships and remain in touch as these children as they grow up. A Christian agency in Hamilton provides a forum for youth to drop in and express themselves. In this same city, there is a safe outdoor skateboarding rink nestled between a police station and a YMCA.

On a macro-analytical level, we need to reconsider treating the teen peer culture as normal. Youths desperately need guidance from adults – parents, aunts, uncles and grandparents. Even if you do not have any children of your own, greet the young people at your church. Ask them about their interests. Make them feel respected. If you are a parent, do not be afraid to ask for support. When we have witnessed and agreed to baptismal vows of a child, we have promised to be a mentor or a guide to him or her in navigating the Christian faith within the 21st century. All of us need to remember that it takes an entire community to effectively raise a child.

Debbie Davis is a social work psychotherapist with a focus on bereavement, loss and trauma.

Classifieds

Birthday

90th Birthday Celebration
July 5th, 2013

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Anniversary

"Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always." Psalm 105:4 NIV

With hearts full of joy and gratitude to God, we celebrate the 50th wedding anniversary of our dear parents and grandparents,

Herman and Betty Vanderburg
(nee Guillaume)

on July 6, 2013.

Madelene Vanderburg
Roland Vanderburg & Loyda Gomez
Gabriel, Jessica, Christopher, Anthony
Ian and Sharon van de Burgt
Arden, Mary, Cordelia
Geoffrey Vanderburg & Jennifer Partridge
Max, Sam, Georgia, Olivia
Mark and Sarah Vanderburg
Abbey, James
Marieka & Daniel Goyetche

"...and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday." Isaiah 58:10 NIV

Obituaries

Lieuwkje "Louisa" Bylsma
(nee Bronger)

Called home to be with her Lord at the Woodstock Private Hospital on Monday June 10, 2013 in her 100th year.

Beloved wife for over 76 years of the late "Jack" Tjerk Bylsma (2012).

Loved mother of
Corrie Bergman – *Woodstock*
Tina Stienstra – *Chatham*
Mike (Betty) Bylsma – *Woodstock*
Florence (Ben) Olthoff – *London*
Cherished grandmother of 16 grandchildren, 33 great-grandchildren and 18 great-great-grandchildren.

Predeceased by her sons-in-law Jans Bergman and Henry Stienstra, by her grandson Jason Olthoff and brother Bouke Bronger.

A memorial service was held at Bethel United Reformed Church in Woodstock on Friday June 14, 2013.

If desired, memorial contributions to the Back to God Hour or a charity of your choice would be appreciated.
Online condolences at www.brockandvisser.com

Nov 27, 1967 May 31, 2013

The Lord took to Himself our daughter, sister, sister in law and aunt

Cora Lynn (Lynn) Kuntz

It was sudden and it hurt. Yet our comfort is in the fact that she was a child of God.
Her favourite text was
"My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth".
Ps.121 vs 2

Lynn's 23 year struggle with Myotonic Dystrophy was over and now she is whole again.

Hank Kuntz
Gerard and Jane
Caleb, Logan and Reuben
Neil
Geoffrey

Correspondence: 703-45 Kingknoll Dr
Brampton ON L6Y 5P2

Fred Gietema

May 29, 1927 Friesland, NL — May 24, 2013 Abbotsford, B.C.

On May 24 Fred Gietema went to his eternal home. He had a strong faith, a love for his family and a zest for life. He was predeceased by Hannah, his wife of 57 years.

He will be missed by his children:
Gertie & John Fictorie
Ann & Carl Van Harten
Helene & Ken Vanderveen
Sharon & Ed Vandenberg
Harvey & Brigitte Gietema
Evelyn & Eric VanEgmond
Ruby & Enno Meijers
Debbie & Ed Groot
40 grandchildren, 11 great-grandchildren and his special friend Ann Van Dorp.

"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"
Philippians 4:4

Johanna de Jong (nee Waterdrinker)

Johanna was born July 30,1919 in Nieuwkoop, in the Netherlands and was called home by her Lord and Saviour on May 28, 2013.

Johanna emigrated to Argentina when she was six years old. From there she moved to Iowa, New Jersey, Toronto, Hamilton and Greensville, Ontario.

She was predeceased in 2003 by Ben de Jong, her husband of 41 years.

She is survived by: Simon Waterdrinker,The Hague, Netherlands; Frances Stout-Waterdrinker, Park Ridge, New Jersey; Marie Millenaar-Waterdrinker, Gutierez, Argentina; Willy Waterdrinker-de Vries, Platanos, Argentina; Dora & Dirk Millenaar-Waterdrinker, Espelita, Argentina, and many nephews and nieces.

A private funeral was held with burial at Mount Zion Cemetery in Flamborough. A service celebrating her life was held on June 14th, at 11 am in the auditorium of Shalom Manor, 12 Bartlett Ave, in Grimsby.

Classifieds

DEADLINE *Christian Courier* is published on the second and forth Mondays of the month.Deadline for each issue is 13 days prior to publication date.
SUBMITTING YOUR AD:
e-mail – **admin@christiancourier.ca**
Mail: 2 Aiken St.
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York Region Senior Christian Homes Inc.

The Meadows
OF AURORA

Eight years ago, a group of Christians very enthused and totally committed came together to build a Christian Retirement Village in York Region. Incorporating in 2005 as the York Region Senior Christian Homes Inc., affectionately known as the "Meadows of Aurora", we are thrilled that this vision is currently becoming a reality.

Construction will begin in the Spring of 2014, with an anticipated occupancy date in the Spring of 2015.

For a membership application and to be placed on our active list, please visit our website or contact us at the following:
York Region Senior Christian Homes Inc.

w: www.themeadowsofaurora.com
e: info@themeadowsofaurora.com t: 905-591-3491

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July 1 Frisian Picnic, 11 am. Pinehurst Lake Conservation area, Paris, Ont. Contact fryskedei@hotmail.com

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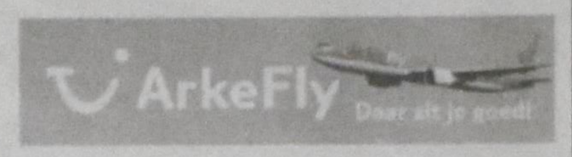

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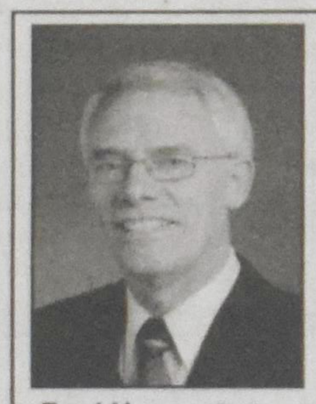

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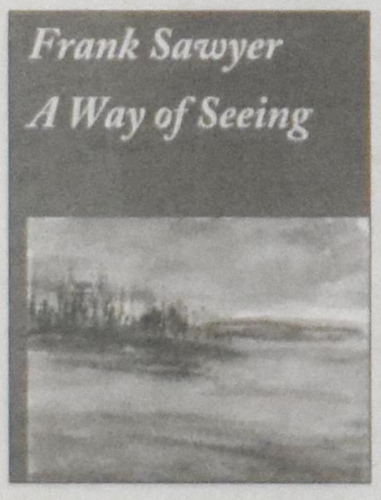

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News

To buy or to boycott: Tough moral choices for Christian consumers and investors

Harold Alkema

The United Church of Canada is weighing in on the issue of what it calls illegal Israeli settlements in Palestinian territory – but with a potential boycott in addition to the usual prayers for peace and requests for reasonable conduct on both sides.

The church is Canada's largest Protestant group with 2.8 million adherents, 525,000 members and 200,000 regular attenders each Sunday, according to the most recent and reliable statistics. With the exception of the Roman Catholic Church, the United Church has the greatest purchasing power of any single Christian denomination in the country.

The church's General Council has identified three companies with production facilities in Palestine as targets for the planned "economic action." Council members are currently discussing the situation with company representatives, but warn that they might urge church members and adherents to boycott items produced by the offending firms if they do not pull out of the occupied territories.

"Over the next several months, the United Church will engage in dialogue with these companies regarding their involvement in the settlements and request that they cease all production in the settlements. They will be informed that failure to do so will result in economic action against their products," the church said in an official statement.

Three companies targeted

The specific firms named in the document are Keter Plastic (located near the Ariel settlement), which manufactures a range of home and garden items; SodaStream (located in the Ma'ale Adumim settlement near Jerusalem), which produces home soda-making devices and ingredients; and Ahava (located in the Mitzpe Shalem settlement in the West Bank), which is a cosmetics company.

Most of Canada's major retailers carry items from the companies named. Stores affected by the boycott could include Canadian Tire, Home Depot, Rona, Future Shop, the Bay, Walmart, Sears and Costco. The impact on the bottom lines of these companies could be minimal if the action is limited to items produced by the companies named above. The United Church has also noted that it will engage with retailers and only take action if the products are not removed from stores. If the church is unconvinced by the responses of retailers and producers it will move ahead with the boycott.

The Canada-Israel trade partnership

Canada and Israel have maintained a bilateral trade agreement since 1996. Annual trade between Canada and Israel was valued at $1.24 billion in 2005. Israel and Israeli companies are generally unaccustomed to high-level criticism coming from Canada. The Harper government has been an unapologetic supporter of Israel. In this case, however, the United Church has parted ways with the ruling Conservatives by calling the occupation of Palestinian territories the main impediment to a viable peace settlement in the Middle East.

The right choice?

Those opposed to the boycott have argued that it would only harm the people it was meant to assist. The Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA), a Toronto-based advocacy group, for example, pointed out that SodaStream alone employs "hundreds" of Palestinian workers. The CIJA commented that claiming to support the Palestinian cause by increasing the number of unemployed Palestinian persons could only be described as "intellectually dishonest." The organization called for a counter boycott by asking its supporters to purchase the products of the companies targeted by the United Church.

Rabbi Poupk: Boycott is 'a missed opportunity"

In an opinion piece for the *Montreal Gazette* Rabbi Reuben J. Poupko argued that the United Church boycott was unfair. He noted that the church statement called the settlements the principal obstacle to peace in the region, but failed to mention Israel's legitimate security concerns and the threat of attack by groups like Hamas and Hezbollah. He further commented that the majority of United Church members and followers actually support Israel, and suggested the church's official line would damage relations with the Jewish community.

Finally, Poupko stated that he felt negotiation rather than boycott was the appropriate means of dealing with the issue. He concluded that the United Church position represented "a missed opportunity to making a real contribution to the cause of finding a just and durable peace in the Holy Land."

International and European responses

While some members of Canada's Jewish community strenuously object to the planned product bans, many international and European-based organizations have also identified Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territories as a major problem in negotiating a workable peace agreement. The Ecumenical Council for Corporate Responsibility (ECCR), a United Kingdom (UK) faith-based organization that promotes ethical investing and purchasing, notes that the Fourth Geneva Convention forbids a warring nation from re-settling its citizens in occupied territories. It also cites United Nations and independent human rights organization research that suggests that Israeli-led economic activity in the occupied territories harms Palestinians because it helps to undermine their legitimate claims to sovereignty in those areas.

The ECCR fully supports the right of Israel to internal security and to market items produced in its own territory internationally. As early as 2009, however, the group stated its opposition to consumption of goods from Israeli settlements located in Palestinian territory. The organization argued that products from the settlements should not be labeled "Product of Israel" as this misleads consumers. The council further suggested that such products should not benefit from low customs duties under the European Union-Israel Association Agreement since this violates the terms of the pact.

Much like the United Church in Canada, the ECCR asked major British and Irish retailers to stop stocking Israeli settlement goods. The majority of stores reacted by removing most of the items identified. In the UK and Ireland, retailer compliance removed the need for an outright boycott.

The United Church of Canada believes that Israeli settlements in Palestinian territory are illegal, and will take "economic action" accordingly.

Ethical purchasing and investing

While debate about how to deal with Israeli settlements is ongoing, the independent stands taken on the issue by the United Church, ECCR and others must give Christians pause for thought. In an increasingly complex and interconnected world it is becoming more necessary to consider not only price and quality, but the social impact of our purchasing and investing decisions.

Harold Alkema is an MA student of public policy at Carleton University. He lives in Ottawa with his wife, Heather.

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